

"PISTOLS ARE TRUMPS!"

BEADLE'S Dime, New York Library



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ENTERED AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., AT SECOND CLASS MAIL RATES.

Vol. XIV. Published Every Week.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y.

March 1, 1882.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

No. 175

Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.

A Romance of Thrilling Adventure, Founded Upon Real Incidents in the Life of J. B. Hickok—"Wild Bill"—and Companion Story to "Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead-Shot; or, Dagger Don's Double."

BY MAJOR DANGERFIELD BURR,

AUTHOR OF "VELVET FACE," "CAPTAIN CRIMSON," "DASHING DANDY," "BUFFALO BILL, THE BUCKSKIN KING," ETC., ETC.



"HOLD! PISTOLS ARE TRUMPS IN THIS GAME OF DEVILTRY, AND WILD BILL PLAYS THEM!"

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CHAPTER I.

A GIRL'S BOLD ACT.

UNMINDFUL of the beauty of the scene spread before them—a valley dotted with the cabin homes of settlers, a crystal river flowing swiftly along, green hills, and mountains in the distance, all shadowed, or tinged by the last rays of the setting sun—a band of stern-faced bordermen were preparing to commit a deed of wrong.

Some two score in number, they stood beneath the shelter of a large tree, while adjacent, were their horses lariated out, or hitched to saplings, patiently awaiting the will of their masters.

In the midst of the group of the stern men stood one not of their race.

His face was red—his blood that of the Indian.

Around his neck was a lariat, and the other end was thrown over the limb of a tree.

Calm, defiant, fearless he stood in the midst of his foes, his bold, handsome face with no war-paint upon it, and his arms bound securely behind his back, so that resistance was of no avail.

He wore the costume and head-dress of a chief, and was the ruler of his tribe, though in years he had counted but twenty-two.

His village was far to the north, and he was alone, for he had come without his warriors, his lance and arrow-points sheathed in white feathers, on a mission of peace to the settlement.

His warriors had captured a famous scout, and in the jail of the settlement was one of his sub-chiefs, and he offered the life of the one for the other.

But no; the settlers had seized upon him, and the young hot-heads were determined that he should hang.

They had disregarded the warnings and entreaties of older heads, and had dragged the chief there to die.

"Draw him up, boys," suddenly called out the leader of the party.

Instantly the feet of the Indian were drawn from the ground, the cruel rope choking off his defiant death-cry.

But at that instant the clatter of hoofs was heard, and straight to the swinging form dashed a mustang.

Upon his back was a rider, and that rider was a young girl, and in face and form she was exquisitely lovely, though her riding-habit was of homespun, and she wore no decorations that add so much to the beauty of the society belle.

Drawing from the belt that encircled her slender waist a small knife, for she was armed, she severed the rope that upheld the Indian, and the tall form dropped to the ground.

"Men, I am ashamed of you, to do so great a wrong."

"That man came to you with words of peace, and because he happens to be the famous chief Black Bear, who has eluded you on the war-path, beaten you in your battles with him, and caused you to fear him, you seek to hang him like a dog, and I say such a disgrace shall not rest on the heads of this settlement."

All knew her, Lou Loring, the Belle of the Border, and nearly every man present was anxious to win her love.

They dropped their heads in shame at her words, while Black Bear rose slowly to his feet and confronted them with the same defiant look.

Then he turned his gaze upon her, for he understood English, and had heard all that she had said.

Leaning from her saddle she quickly cut the bonds that bound his arms, and pointing to his weapons, which lay at the foot of the tree, and his mustang that was hitched near, she said:

"Let the Black Bear take his weapons and pony and return to his village."

"His brother chief shall follow him, and if he has a heart, the Black Bear will release the pale-face scout his warriors hold."

"The Valley Lily shall know that the Black Bear has a heart, for the pale-face warrior shall return to his people," was the dignified response.

Then, taking up his arms, and mounting his horse, the chief rode slowly away.

Watching him until he was out of sight, with a cold bow to those she had cheated of their human game, Lou Loring rode back into the settlement, and, as her father was the jailer, as well as the store-keeper and general dignitary of Valley Farms, she released the captive warrior, told him to mount her horse and follow his chief.

"Great Heavens, child! what have you done?" cried her father, who arrived in breathless haste, having heard all that had occurred.

"I have saved this settlement from a general massacre, father; that is all," was her calm response.

CHAPTER II.

AN INDIAN LOVER.

THE home of "Captain" Loring, as he was called by courtesy, was the last house down the valley, and by far the most imposing of all the cabins in the settlement.

It was a comfortable, four-room log cabin, situated upon a hill that sloped to the river, and commanded a view of the entire valley.

The captain had only himself and his daughter to care for in the world, and was well-to-do, for he had quite an extensive farm, a store, in fact the store of the settlement, and possessed herds of cattle and ponies.

He was postmaster, and the "head" of the settlement, and was as popular as was his beautiful daughter.

Lou Loring was but seventeen years of age, at the time this story opens, and yet had received scores of offers.

To all she had returned a negative answer, and yet her father had a lurking suspicion that one young settler had won her heart.

That one was a college graduate, and the son of a wealthy New York family, and why he had come to the border was a mystery which he had not explained.

His name was Hugh Harcourt, and he was but twenty, though he appeared older.

He had joined an emigrant train bound for Valley Farms, and had been well mounted, thoroughly armed, and had a few thousand dollars with him.

He had staked out a claim, built a comfortable home, bought cattle, and there were prospects of his becoming well off.

But Hugh Harcourt was a dandy in his dress, and his elegant form and exceedingly handsome face took with the maidens of the settlement.

The men said that he was an expert gambler, and once, when drinking, he had hinted that he had been compelled to leave his eastern home to escape trial for a killing scrape, and his father had helped him out of the difficulty.

This story had spread, of course, and Captain Alfred Loring had not cared for his daughter to encourage his attentions to her, and one day she had refused his offer to her, although there was no doubt but that he had won the only love of her heart.

Thus matters stood at the time of the rescue of Black Bear by Lou Loring, and the leader of the young men, whom she had frustrated, was her discarded lover, Hugh Harcourt.

Had any one else done what Lou Loring had, she would have made bitter enemies; but the beauty, wit, and comely character of the Border Belle, as she was called, enabled her to do what she pleased, and ere long the settlers came to thank her for it, and felt that she had indeed averted a massacre, or at least an uprising of the Indians, for, true to his promise, Black Bear had released the captive white scout, who returned in safety to Valley Farms, and upheld the act of the fearless girl, for he knew well the temper of the red-skins, and for their loved chief they would have fought to the death.

Thus several months passed away and one night, having closed his store and returned to his home, Captain Loring and Lou were seated in the cosey sitting-room of the cabin, chatting pleasantly together.

The man and woman servant had gone down to a class meeting in what was called the village, although the captain's store, a schoolhouse, church and blacksmith shop comprised it, and all was quiet on the farm.

Presently there came a knock at the door, and upon opening it, with no dread that it was other than some settler, Captain Loring started, as a tall Indian stepped within.

He was in full war-paint and feathers, and was not at first glance recognized by either the settler or his daughter, as he stood before them with dignified mien his arms folded upon his broad breast.

His pose and appearance were grand, though full of savage grandeur, and he certainly was a splendid specimen of manhood.

"The Black Bear is welcome," said Lou Loring, gaining her presence of mind before her startled father could do so.

"Will he sit down and take food in my father's cabin?" she continued.

"Yes, you are welcome, Black Bear, and we will get you some supper, for you proved yourself a white Indian, in releasing Buck Bruno, the scout," said the captain.

"Black Bear is not in need of food; but his heart is hungry for the love of the Valley Lily, and he has come to ask her to be his wife, and bring sunshine to his tepee."

The Indian spoke with calm dignity, and his dark, earnest eyes were turned full upon the maiden, who turned deadly pale at his words.

As for Captain Loring he was infuriated at the impertinence of Black Bear, and started toward him, as though to spring upon him, but was checked by an entreating cry from poor Lou.

"Father, forbear! the great chief, Black Bear, has asked me to become his wife, and allow me to answer him."

Then she walked up to the Indian and said softly:

"The Black Bear must know that the heart of the Valley Lily, as he calls me, is not her own, and she never cares to marry any one."

"He is an Indian, and she is a pale-face, and as far separated as is the winter and summer."

"Were she to leave her home and her people, the Black Bear would soon have to place her in her grave, for she would pine away and die."

"Let the Black Bear return to his tribe, and select from among the red-skin maidens of his village, one to take to his tepee as a bride."

The chief listened most attentively to her words, but showed no sign of what impression they made upon him.

But when she had finished speaking, he said:

"The Black Bear has heard, but his ears refuse to listen, for the Valley Lily must be his wife."

"No," and Lou spoke firmly.

"The Black Bear has spoken."

"No!"

"Let me throw the red rascal out of the door, Lou," cried the captain.

The eyes of the chief flashed at his words, and he said sternly:

"The pale-face has but to look out of that door to see hundreds of my warriors, ready to come at my war-cry."

Captain Loring turned pale, and, again entreated by his daughter, remained silent, while she said:

"The Black Bear comes with war-paint on his face, and with his warriors at his back, to seek a pale-face wife."

"Let him return with his braves and come alone, and the Valley Lily will hear what he has to say."

Lou Loring spoke quietly, but she well knew that there was trouble ahead, and tried to gain time, so as to give warning to the settlers.

But the wily chief had become infatuated with her beauty, and really loved her for having saved his life.

He knew that he was a great chief, and that any maiden of his village would be glad to preside over his tepee.

Why then should he be refused by the pale-face girl?

CHAPTER III.

SACRIFICED.

FOR a moment, after Lou Loring's last words, Black Bear remained silent.

Then he said:

"The Black Bear knows that the singing bird cannot be made to sing, or the flower to bloom when it has no sunshine, and he would win the love of the Valley Lily by bringing her trophies of his skill as a hunter; he would make for her a grand tepee, and do deeds that would win her affection."

"But his warriors will not wait, for they have unburied the hatchet against the pale-faces."

"The people of the Valley Lily have killed my people, have burned my villages, have stolen the ponies of my warriors, and yet they say the hatchet is buried."

"But my braves have painted their faces and have come upon the war-path, and they are in numbers as the fringe on the Black Bear's leggings, and will strike the pale-face tepees before the moon comes from behind the mountains."

Both Captain Loring and his daughter were thunderstruck at this announcement.

They knew that many young men in the settlement had done some treacherous deeds of late toward the Indians, and had openly boasted that they had struck a village, in the absence of its warriors, and burned the tepees, and run off the ponies.

Now the Indians were on the war-path for revenge, and those who knew the red-skin character could well understand what that revenge would be.

The settlers could bring together a hundred fighting men, it was true; but both the captain and Lou knew that, taken by surprise, as they would be, they would be no match for Black Bear and the five hundred braves it was known he could take into battle with him.

The father and daughter read what was passing in the face of each other, and, almost wild at the desperation of their situation, the maiden said:

"And the Black Bear comes to the Valley Lily to ask her love, and brings his braves to kill her people!"

"The Black Bear has urged his warriors not to come; but they had no ears to hear him."

"He has told them that he loved the Valley Lily and would not lead her to his tepee, with the hand red with blood of her people, and they ask him will the Lily go to his tepee?"

"And your answer?" and the voice of the maiden was hoarse with suppressed emotion.

"That the Black Bear will ask her."

"If the Lily refuses to go to your tepee?"

"Then the warriors of the Black Bear will bound away upon the war-path."

"Has the Black Bear no power to stop his braves?"

"My people have suffered greatly, and my braves are black with anger, and will not listen."

"If I consent to go to your tepee?"

As Lou Loring spoke her voice trembled and she was perfectly pallid.

"Then my warriors will go back to their village, and the hatchet will be buried."

"Then I make the sacrifice, chief."

"The Valley Lily will go to your tepee and be your bride."

She sunk down in a chair as she spoke, and covered her face with her hands.

The eyes of the Indian chief flashed joyfully, and Captain Loring cried savagely:

"No, no! By Heaven this sacrifice shall not be made, Lou."

"It shall be, father."

"I say no, and, come what may, I shall hurl this red devil from my house."

"Father! remember, it will but start the volcano that lies beneath our feet, as it were, and this lovely valley will be the scene of red carnage and death within the hour."

"I am but one, and if these red warriors are turned loose upon the settlement, the victims will be many."

"It is hard for you, my dear father; but it is harder for me, and yet I make the sacrifice to save others."

"But can you trust the chief?"

"Yes, father, I feel that I can."

"The Black Bear's tongue is not crooked," said the Indian.

"Then, when he comes again, and alone, the Valley Lily will become his wife," said the captain.

But the cunning Indian saw through the ruse of the captain, and said:

"The Valley Lily must return now with the Black Bear."

Captain Loring groaned in agony of spirit;

but, mastering her emotion Lou said, addressing the Indian:

"The laws of the pale-faces are different from those of the Black Bear; but he must make her his wife by the words of the Great Spirit Chief of her people, and when she goes to his village, the Medicine Chief of his tribe can make her the same as an Indian maiden."

"The Black Bear is willing," was the reply.

"Then I will go for Parson Brownlow, and have him perform the marriage service," said Captain Loring eagerly, seizing his hat.

But the arm of Black Bear detained him.

"No, the pale-face has a crooked heart, and would tell the white braves that the Black Bear and his warriors are here."

"Let the Valley Lily go, and if she comes back with more than the Great Spirit Chief, her father will die by the hand of the Black Bear."

Lou Loring shuddered, for she too understood that there was no escape for her.

True, she could warn the settlers, and once alarmed, they could perhaps beat back the Indians, though many would suffer.

But then her father's life would be the certain sacrifice, and therefore she would not retreat from her pledge, and merely ask the minister to come with her to her home.

She left the cabin, saddled and mounted her horse, and dashed away to Parson Brownlow's house, leaving Black Bear standing outside of the door, with her father a prisoner, watching her.

She had caught sight of dark forms flitting here and there, and knew that the chief's warriors lay hidden in the woods and elsewhere, and that his threat had not been an idle one.

The mile to Parson Brownlow's she rode like the wind, and found upon her arrival there, that worthy man just preparing to read family prayer in his little household.

"Is your father sick, daughter?" he asked.

"No, parson; but he is anxious to see you upon an important matter."

The parson was a brisk moving man, for the school-teacher of the settlement, and the saver of souls, he was forced to be spry to keep up with the youthful generation who were his pupils, and to get ahead of "the world, the flesh and the devil" that would show itself in his flock.

Hence it did not take him long to mount his old horse and return with poor Lou, whom he found it hard to draw into conversation, for her heart was full to breaking.

Upon his arrival he started at finding Black Bear a guest of Captain Loring's cabin, and fairly trembled at the revelation made to him.

The parson was a good man, and gently urged against the sacrifice; but he was a cautious man, and a selfish one, and rather than that he should be scalped, he preferred to have poor Lou the sufferer.

"She is but one, and we are many, besides she is not butchered and scalped, and we would be."

"The chief is a fine looking man, and I guess would be a better husband to her than Hugh Harcourt and other profligates that are devil-doomed about here."

"He's off color, I know; but Pocahontas was an Indian and she married a pale-face, and I married a nigger to a white man once, and that was worse."

"So I guess I'll perform the ceremony, though I'll not get any fee out of it, unless I take that handsome buffalo-robe the chief wears."

Such was the argument of Parson Brownlow, and he being willing, and Captain Loring unable to say nay, while Lou consented to be sacrificed, no more was said.

In a stolid way the chief went through the ceremony, while Lou Loring was as white as a corpse, and could scarce keep from fainting.

But she passed the ordeal bravely, then threw herself into her father's arms and wept.

A moment she yielded to weakness, and then with a sad farewell she tottered toward the door.

The chief placed her in her saddle, called his own pony to his side and mounted, and they said:

"The Black Bear will keep his word, and the hatchet shall be buried."

Then the two rode away, and behind them, at a signal from the chief, came hundreds of warriors, who seemed to have sprung like magic from the ground.

And through the settlement went the sad tidings of poor Lou's sacrifice, and strong men

wept when they knew the fate of the noble girl, and envious maidens forgave her the heart-aches she had caused them.

CHAPTER IV. AN ASSASSIN AND AN AVENGER.

"I FEEL strangely sad to night, and a weight like an iron hand rests on my heart."

The speaker stood on the banks of the Mississippi river, and was gazing out over the starlight waters.

The hour was late, and he had come forth from a small cottage standing back from the river, and from the open door of which shone a bright light.

A mile or so below him were visible the lights of the city of St. Louis that cast their bright reflections far up into the sky, and there came to his ears the rumble of wheels rolling over the stony pavements.

As he stood there, his hat off, as though to cool his brow with the evening breeze, he was so taken up with the thoughts that were flashing through his brain, that he failed to observe a dark form cautiously coming toward him, while out upon the waters a black object was visible that indicated a boat, for, instead of floating down with the stream, it was slowly coming shoreward, impelled by the two oars urged by strong arms.

Nearer and nearer the form drew to him, until the one so noiselessly approaching could hear the musings of the man standing upon the river bank, for he spoke aloud:

"Ah me!" he said; "it is seventeen years since that fateful night, and yet it is as fresh in my memory as though it were but yesterday."

"Oh, what a coward I was not to die for her, ay with her then, rather than see her meet such a fate."

"Poor, noble girl, sacrificed to save others, and becoming the wife, ay, the slave of an Indian master."

"You saved Valley Farms settlement, my beautiful Lou, but you wrecked yourself, for, to what a life of degradation and misery did you not go?"

"Who will ever know the anguish you suffered as the squaw of an Indian chief?"

"They say you were a queen among the red-skins, and that your Indian husband ever treated you well; but may I be accursed for my selfishness and cowardice, in not dying for that night."

"Better had it been that I killed you with my own hand, than have had you become what you did, and oh! why did I not live to avenge you, instead of living to make accursed gold?"

"Though blight and ruin should have followed me, as ever did the sorrow of knowing what you suffered, I have instead grown rich in this world's goods, and now pass my declining years in regret, for wealth buys me not peace of soul."

"They say that you are dead, laid away in a canyon of the mountains, having died of a broken heart, while I live on."

"And scouts and trappers have told me that you left a beautiful child, and that her father, Black Bear, loves her as he did you."

"Well, my duty is plain, and that is that I leave all my wealth to your child, that Indian girl."

"Ha! I will myself see the child, and if old Black Bear refuses to give her to me, I will take her from him, and make her my heiress—ha!—oh God! help! help! help!"

With the last word uttered Captain Alfred Loring fell upon the ground, while above him bent the dark form that had noiselessly crept upon him.

And in his hand he held a knife which he had driven deep into the back of his victim.

"Aha! at last I have money, for here it is, and I have not tracked him in vain," said the assassin gloatingly, as he bent over the prostrate man, and drew a roll of bank notes from his pocket.

But just then the boat that had been slowly coming across the river touched the bank, and the occupant sprung out.

The assassin heard and saw him for the first time, and turned to bound away.

"Hold! or I fire!" rung out in clear, stern tones.

But the assassin heeded not, and bounding on, there came a flash and sharp report, and the man fell dead, still clutching the bank notes in his hand.

CHAPTER V.

THE INDIAN HEIRESS.

BOUNDING up the bank the boatman bent over the prostrate form of Captain Loring, just as two persons came hastening, half-dressed, out of the little cottage.

The one was an old man, the other a woman, his wife, and they cried in chorus:

"What is it? Are you kilt, cap'n?"

"Come here and aid me to carry him into the house, for he is, I fear, fatally wounded," ordered, rather than said the boatman in peremptory tones.

"Who is it that's kilt?" asked the old man timidly.

"Come and see, for I do not know him."

"I was crossing the river from the other shore, where I have been gunning, and landed there just as that dead villain drove a knife into his back and robbed him."

"Lordy! is that a dead man?" asked the old woman, looking up the bank to where she and her husband now saw the dark form of the assassin lying.

"Yes; but if I stop to answer all your questions this man will die."

"Come, one of you hasten for a doctor, while the other aids me in doing what I can for this man, who may not be mortally wounded."

The tone of the speaker had the desired effect, for the old man darted away to the stable to get a horse and go after the doctor, while the old woman hastened back to the cottage to prepare a cot for the wounded man.

Raising him in his strong arms the one so opportunely arriving upon the scene bore Captain Loring into the little cottage and placed him upon a bed, while he proceeded to staunch the blood that flowed from the ugly wound in his back.

"Who is he?" he asked.

"His name is Captain Alfred Loring, sir, and he boards with us."

"He is very rich, and a nice gentleman as anybody wants to know," answered the old woman.

"Well, he will have to die, for he can never recover from this wound."

"See, he is returning to consciousness, and then it will be a question of but short time before he goes."

As the man spoke Captain Loring groaned, and then opening his eyes and glancing around let them rest upon the old woman.

"What has happened, Mrs. Bentley?" he asked faintly.

"You have been wounded, cap'n, and this gentleman says—"

"An assassin struck you in the back, sir, to rob you, and overhearing his words, I think he followed you from town," interrupted the stranger.

"Yes, I drew quite a sum from the bank to-day, and noticed a rough-looking man watching me."

"And he got my money and escaped?"

"No, for I called to him to halt; and, as he did not obey, I killed him, and here is the roll of bills I took from his hand."

"But you must not talk, sir, as your wound is a severe one."

"I know it; yes, I feel that it is my death wound, for I have had a presentiment of evil for days."

"I owe you thanks, sir."

"Do not speak of it, sir; I only wish I had landed from my boat a moment sooner to have prevented that villain's blow."

"Ah! sir, it was predestined."

"Well, I do not repine, for I have lived my time, I suppose, and only sorrow have I known of late years; ay, for seventeen long years I have bitterly suffered."

"But, sir, I feel myself growing weaker, and would see a lawyer ere I die, for I have a duty to perform."

"This woman's husband has gone for a physician, sir, and I am a lawyer; if I can be of service command me."

"Thank God!" and Alfred Loring gazed into the bold, intelligent face of the man before him, as though he had done him a greater service in saying he was a lawyer, than in having killed his assassin.

Just then the physician arrived, and the slightest examination of the wound was sufficient to show that it was fatal.

"Well doctor, tell me the truth?"

"You must die, Captain Loring."

"Amen!"

The word was uttered almost thankfully,

and then, after an instant's silence, Alfred Loring said, addressing the lawyer:

"You have heard, sir?"

"Yes."

"The doctor can do me no good."

"I feared so, sir, from the first."

"You can."

"I am at your service wholly."

"Your name, please."

"Mark Manning."

"Thank you; now, Mr. Manning, get pen, ink and paper, and draw up my will as I dictate, and I will sign it while I have strength, and the doctor and my friends here can be witnesses, while I make you, sir, executor."

The young lawyer looked both surprised and pleased, and soon had the writing materials before him.

Then the will was dictated slowly, but in a firm voice, interrupted now and then by groans which suffering wrung from the strong man.

And to the child of Black Bear, Sioux Chief, and his late white wife, Louisa Loring, said child answering to the Indian name of Red Dove, the large fortune of Alfred Loring was bequeathed, excepting small legacies to Abram Bentley and his wife, and a few thousand dollars as a fee to the young lawyer.

"And to you, Mark Manning, I give the duty of finding my grand-child, and placing in her hands the fortune I bequeath her."

"Now give me the pen," and taking it, Alfred Loring wrote his name in a full, firm hand, which half an hour after was cold in death.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD BUCKSKIN THE SCOUT.

POKER CITY was a characteristic border town in the heart of a mining region, and its denizens were of a type that did not inspire perfect confidence in a stranger at the first glance.

Still, beneath those bearded faces honesty and nobleness was hidden, the work-worn hands could give a square grip, and a true heart beat under the coarse woolen shirt.

Many of the citizens, in fact most of them, were men "on the make," and adventurers hired these for the purpose of making a fortune in the easiest way to themselves.

But there were others who had come there to work hard for fortune's smiles, and to take the yellow metal they had dug from the earth, back to the loved ones in the far-away homes.

"The Ranchero's Exchange," was the principal hotel in the place, if it even could be designated under that title, and then there were the cabins of the miners, a score of stores, double that number of drinking shops and gambling saloons, the grandest of the latter being Paddy Wells's "Palis o' Fine Arts," as the sign read.

Then there were several blacksmith shops, a jail, which was used for preaching in, when there was a parson to preach, the prisoners if any, being ironed during the service.

Such was Poker City, at the time I write of, and it is no wonder that a young man, who alighted from the noonday stage, before the Ranchero's Exchange, gazed somewhat curiously around him.

He was a man of large stature, well-formed, dressed in a corduroy hunting suit, wore a sombrero and top-boots, and had a face that was good-looking, resolute, fearless, and yet a trifle cunning and selfish.

If he was armed, he wore his weapons under his sack-coat, and looked, what many believed he was, a huntsman, or a stage-line or express-agent.

Upon the register of the hotel he wrote his name in a bold hand, and it read:

"Mark Manning—St. Louis, Mo."

He asked for a pleasant room, said he expected to remain some little time, wished to know where he could purchase a good horse and procure a good guide.

These questions he asked of "Governor Dave," as the landlord was called, and who had come into the proprietorship of the hotel through the death of the former owner, Bouncer Brooks, who had laid a plot for the assassination of Wild Bill Hickok, and been promptly caught in his own death-trap.

Governor Dave had been the "Boss of the Bar," before, and felt his dignity greatly by his promotion.

To Mark Manning's question he answered:

"I can sell you as good a horse as you ever backed, and that belonged to my late lamented friend, the former proprietor of my hotel."

"I can give you pleasant quarters and good

hash as long as you pay for them, and I'll find some one who can tell you about a guide."

"Come, take som'en an' then go in and get your dinner while it's hot, for I hate cold vitals, an' you looks as tho' you might do the same."

Mark Manning accepted both invitations of the Governor, and when he had taken his seat at the hotel table, he found next to him a man who had a youthful-looking form, but whose hair, worn falling upon his shoulders, and beard, which fell to his waist, were almost snow-white.

His eyes were black and piercing, his face bronzed and ruddy, and there were few that could guess within a quarter of a century of his age.

He wore black buckskin leggings, a hunting-shirt of the same material, top-boots, a belt of arms, and a black sombrero lay by his chair.

"I heerd yer ax fer a guide, Pard Stranger?" said the man, addressing Mark Manning after he had taken his seat.

"Yes, I wanted to engage a good man for some work I have on hand."

"Do you know of such a one?"

"I does."

"Is he in Poker City?"

"He are."

"And can be relied on?"

"For what biz?"

"As a man who will not shirk danger or hardship!"

"He can."

"And is thoroughly acquainted with this country and the Indian tribes?"

"He are."

"Then he will suit me."

"What is his name?"

"Old Buckskin the Scout."

"Where can I find him?"

"Rig'at here."

"Where?" and Manning glanced up and down the table, at the few boarders still eating.

"I are Old Buckskin ther scout."

"You?"

"Yas; don't I look it, Stranger Pard?"

Mark Manning looked at the buckskin suit and white hair and beard, and said honestly:

"You do look the Old Buckskin."

"Ah! yer thinks I needs recommendations as ter bein' ther scout?"

"I do not doubt your capacity, sir, and if you are known here as a scout of ability I will engage your services."

"Ask ther Governor ef I hain't a man that knows a pony track from a buffler-bull huf."

"Well, come to my room after dinner and we will talk it over."

"I'll be thar, pard."

Mark Manning having finished discussing the edibles of the Ranchero's Exchange cuisine, sought Governor Dave.

"Do you know a man here by the name of Old Buckskin?"

"I do."

"Well, is he a good scout?"

"No one has a better reputation as such, though little is known else regarding him."

"Tell me what you know of him, please?"

"Well, he has led the Vigilantes in several of their expeditions, is as brave as a lion, and was once the only survivor of a party of rangers that went on an Indian trail."

"He lives somewhere in the mountains, and alone, comes to town very seldom, and only to buy provisions, and sell pelts."

"He is in town now, and might be willing to be your guide."

"He is willing; and I'll engage him as such," and Mark Manning went to his room, where soon after he was joined by Old Buckskin.

CHAPTER VII.

TRAILING AN HEIRESS.

Be seated, old man, and fill up your pipe," said Mark Manning, as Old Buckskin entered his room in answer to the call to "come in."

"I doesn't smoke, pard, fer it onsteadies the narves, an' seldom are it I takes tanglefoot, fer that makes a man jerky, an' one in my biz hes ter be sure he kin hit dead center when he has call ter shoot."

"This is a pretty wild place, Poker City, and a man's life is not worth much here?" volunteered Mark Manning inquiringly.

"Well, it are a leetle tough, in its way; but then a man's life are wuff just as much ter him heur as it are in other places, only that hain't as many as kin take car' o' the'rsevles, an' ther law don't help 'em."

"As fer me, I are not meddlesome, but ef I are called on ter subscribe ter a entertainment, I allus tries ter be lib'ral."

"Now, pard, what are yer name?"
"Mark Manning."

"Whar does yer hail from?"

"St. Louis."

"A like village, I has heerd; waal, what kin I do fer yer?"

"You know this country well?"

"I does, from Oregon to Dakota, and from thar ter Texas."

"You are acquainted with the Indian tribes who are in this vicinity?"

"Yas, an' they is acquainted with me."

"Do you know the tribe of Black Bear?"

"I does, an' the B'ar hisself."

"Indeed; then you are the man I want," said Mark Manning eagerly.

"I guess I are," was the laconic response.

"Does Black Bear have his village far from here?"

"A purty long jump."

"He is a great chief."

"He are ther boss of 'em all, an' squar', too, fer an Injun."

"Has he any family?"

"Famby?"

"Yes, a wife and children?"

"Waal, he had a white wife, which he tuk from a settlement, she goin' with him as his squaw, ter keep his warriors from massacreein' Valley Farms."

"What became of her?"

"She were too high-toned ter live in a tepee, an' she tarned her toes up ter ther daisies jist one year an' a half arter she become Mrs. Black B'ar."

"Did she leave any children?"

"Yas, pard."

"How many?"

"Waal, some says two, an' then I hes heerd that one are ther child of Bear's second wife, who was the daughter of a chief, whom he married shortly arter marryin' his first wife, ter consolidate ther tribes."

"Yer knows, I reckon, that Injuns is like Mormons, they kin hev more'n one wife?"

"Yes, so I have heard."

"But tell me, Buckskin, was this child by his first wife a boy or a girl?"

"She were a girl, an' t'other one, by ther Injun wife, he were a boy."

"Do you know her name?"

"They calls her Red Dove, but she kin show ther claws o' a wildcat when she are cornered, an' are as good on ther trail an' ther shoot as arry warrior in ther tribe."

"Ther boy are calt Iron Eyes, an' he hev already won his eagle-feathers, an' ther two ter-gether, an' they hunts as a pair, are a team as no man w'u'd find it healthy ter tackle."

The eyes of the young lawyer sparkled with joy at the discovery he had made thus far, and he mentally congratulated himself upon being so fortunate as to meet Old Buckskin.

"Tell me, my friend, when did you last see this maiden?"

"Red Dove?"

"Yes."

"About two weeks ago."

"Is she pretty?"

"Purty hain't ther name, pard, fer she are jist dervine."

"How old is she?"

"Bout sixteen, or thereabout."

"She has the Indian complexion of course."

"Oh! she do show that that's Injun blood in her veins; but then ther white blood o' her ma are more evident, an' she were a beauty."

"You knew her mother then?"

The old scout fairly started at the question, and a strange fire flashed in his eyes, while he seemed about to make some quick reply; but checking himself, he said quietly:

"Yas, I know'd her."

"What was her name?"

"Louisa Loring."

"There can be no mistake," muttered the lawyer half aloud, and then he asked:

"Does the Red Dove speak English?"

"As good as I does—waal, I'd better say as you does, fer my English are jist a leetle off color, as yer may hev obsarved, pard."

"But she is not educated?"

"Pard, don't yer show yerself a greenhorn, ef yer means by eddication, ther l'arnin' she hev got out o' books."

"But ef yer means ridin' a bar-back mustang, shootin' a bow an' arrer, throwin' a lariat, hittin' dead center with a rifle an' pistol,

an' throwin' a knife whar she aims it, she are ther best eddyicated gal I ever seen."

"They do say a missionary what dwelt a long time in ther tribe taught her book-larin', but I doesn't know that."

"Well, my man, I have come out West just to see the Red Dove."

Old Buckskin looked his surprise.

"What! does yer intend ter git her to travel with a cirkiss as ther most beaut'ful Injun gal on top o' ther 'arth?"

"No."

"Does yer want ter marry a Injun gal?"

"No. I suppose I can trust you?"

"Yer kin ontill death do us part."

"Well, as I told you I am a lawyer."

"You don't say?"

"Yes, and I am the executor of an estate."

"The what—a cutor of what State?"

"You don't understand."

"No, but I are willin' ter."

"I am in charge of a property that was left by one Captain Alfred Loring, to the child of his daughter, the same Lou Loring that married Black Bear."

"A Injun gal with money?"

"Yes, and it is a large fortune at that."

"Now, I have come here to meet this Red Dove, who is the heiress, and tell her of her good fortune, urging that she return to St. Louis with me and take possession of it."

"Lordy! but is yer hitched, pard?"

"I don't understand."

"Is yer married?"

"Oh! no, I am a single man."

"I see; waal, yer wants me ter arrange fer yer ter see ther Red Dove?"

"I do."

"What are yer willin' ter plank?"

"How do you mean?"

"What amount o' dust are it worth ter yer ter see ther gal?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"My scalp are worth more than that."

"Then it would be dangerous to go to Black Bear's village?"

"Jist try it, pard; but afore yer leaves let me hev a lock o' yer ba'r ter send ter yer parints, fer ther Injuns w'u'd take ther rest."

"I have no desire to be killed, but I will risk any danger to see the Red Dove."

"Yer see, old Black B'ar did love that white wife o' his'n, ther are no doubt, an' she made a good Injun o' him, an' eddyicated him all she c'u'd."

"Waal, all that love, an' more too, he hev give ter her child, an' ther man as goes to take ther Red Dove away from him hes a hard road ter travel, I kin sw'ar."

"Then there must be some secret arrangement made to see her?"

"Yas."

"And you can arrange this?"

"I kin."

"What is your price?"

"Two thousand dollars."

"That is a large sum."

"I hev a large scalp lock."

"Well, you arrange for me to meet the Red Dove, and I will pay you the money."

"I tell yer, pard, jist leave it with a fr'en' o' mine in town ter pay it ter me when I brings a order from you, or give it back ter you ef I doesn't take yer ter ther gal."

"Thet are fa'r an' squar', hain't it?"

"Yes, and I will do as you wish."

"Now, when shall we start on our trip?"

"In a week's time, fer I hes got ter l'arn ther doin' o' a feller as is a friend o' ther gal's, an' who w'u'd fight ther devil ter serve her, ef he thought we meant any harm to her."

"But, on the contrary, I mean only good to her."

"But who is this man?" asked Manning, somewhat anxiously.

"A fr'en' o' hers."

"An Indian?"

"No; he are ci'ar white, an' a terrer."

"A bad character, you mean?"

"He are ther badest man in these heur parts on ther shoot, an' Poker City knows it."

"But who is he?"

"Yer'll find his name on ther tavern register when he comes ter town, an' he do sometimes, as 'Wild Bill, thur Pistol Dead Shot.'

"Ha! Wild Bill, the famous frontiersman!"

"Thet same."

"He is known all over the country."

"He are ther terrer in these parts, an' yet he are a peaceable man when they doesn't rile him."

"And he lives here?"

"No, pard; he has a ranch 'hey say is haunted 'way off in the mountains."

"Ther boys went thar ter git acquainted with him, an' they succeeded, an' he hev help'd ther Poker City graveyard along amazin'."

"He run ter cover ther Robin Red Breast, a renegade of ther mountains, an' then Devil Dan, our Vigilante cap'n, who were playin' a double game, fer he were a road-agent too, an' Red Dove an' Iron Eyes, her half brother, helped him in them scrapes, an' ther gal an' Old Black B'ar on'st tuk keer o' Wild Bill when he were wounded, so he sits great store by that Injun famly."

"But I have come here for the good of the girl, and I shall allow no interference from Wild Bill or any other desperado," said Manning, sternly.

"Pard, that hain't ther question as ter what yer'll allow; it are what Wild Bill will allow."

"He must keep clear of me or there will be trouble."

"You talks an' look grit, pard, an' I believes yer'll back up yer words."

"But ther best plan are not ter let Bill know about yer wanting ther gal, an' then thar will be no trouble."

"Did you ever write a letter ter ther Injun agint heur about ther gal, an' a fortin left her?"

"Yes," answered the lawyer, with surprise, and then he added:

"But I got no answer."

"More'n likely, as ther letter were tuk from ther mail by ther road-agint, Dagger Dan, an' fell inter Bill's han's as a inheritance, he hevin' got him strung up fer ther safety o' ther com-munity."

"Wild Bill 'vised ther gal ter go East with a young man, an' see ef thar were any truth in it, an' that young feller tried ter force ther gal ter marry him, kept her tied in a cave, an' as Bill met a friend who had jist come ther way they went, an' hadn't seen 'em, he got anxious, struck thar trail, an' that young aspirant fer matrimony with a Injun wife, jist tanned his toes up ter ther daisies."

"Then Wild Bill tuk ther gal back ter her people."

"This didn't leak out in general, pard, but I knows about it; so yer see I hes heerd o' this fortin fer a Injun heiress afore."

"So it seems; but does this Wild Bill love the girl?"

"No tellin', pard."

"Well, arrange it your own way for me to see her."

"I'll do it, an' first find out jist what Wild Bill are, an' what he are doin'."

And Old Buckskin's search for Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot, seemed satisfactory, for, a few days after the conversation just related, two men rode out of Poker City after night-fall, both well mounted and armed, and the two were Mark Manning, the St. Louis lawyer, and the white-haired scout.

CHAPTER VIII.

WILD BILL.

THE morning following, after the departure of Old Buckskin and the lawyer on the hunt for the Indian heiress, a horseman rode slowly into Poker City.

He was a man of splendid physique, over six feet in height, broad-shouldered, and sat his horse, a superb animal, with the ease of one born in the saddle.

The bridle and trappings, the saddle and serape, the last in a roll behind the saddle-tree, were of the finest kind and very showy, and the black animal stepped proudly as though he had pride in his outfit and rider.

The rider was dressed in a black velvet sack-coat, gray corduroy pants, stuck in cavalry boots, and a dove-colored sombrero, encircled by a gold cord.

In front, as his coat was open, was visible a gold buckle that fastened the ends of a leather belt, which upheld two revolvers and a long bowie-knife, while above his boot legs were sticking the butts of two more revolvers, most easily gotten at if needed.

The face of the man was a study for an artist, for it was clear cut in every feature, fearless to recklessness and resolute to sternness.

The eyes were dark and full of fire, and seemed to look one through and through, and the hair was very long, falling below his shoulders, and of a dark-brown hue and wavy.

A mustache with long ends but half hid the determined, cynical mouth, and the rows of even, milk-white teeth.

Wild Bill's Trump Card.

Altogether he was a man to do and dare, to win love and cause fear, a bitter foe, a true friend, one who asked no odds and took all chances, calm as a May morn in the greatest danger, and deadly as Death when armed.

As he entered the street of Poker City he urged his horse into a canter, and stopping before the Ranchero's Exchange, dismounted.

"Go to the stable, Midnight," he said quietly to his horse, when he had taken off his saddle-roll, and the intelligent animal galloped around the hotel to the back yard, as though well-knowing the place.

"Ah! Wild Bill, glad to see you."

"Hav'n't seen you seen you since the day we hung up Dagger Don," said Governor Dave, extending his hand in welcome, and in the other holding out a pen for him to register his name.

"Thank you, Dave."

"Is there any news in town?" asked Wild Bill, in his soft tones and quiet way.

"Not an item, an' things are stale since the gang got cleaned out, an' there's talk of a church and a temp'rance society."

"But the stage going west is due soon, and there may be something of interest to hear then."

"How's your ranch?"

"All getting along well, thank you; but is this person here?" and Wild Bill pointed to a name on the register, which he had been quietly glancing over.

"Ah! you mean Mr. Manning?"

"Yes; who is he?"

"A lawyer from St. Louis, I believe, and a reg'lar gent all over."

"Pays for all he gets, an' got good accommodations."

"Is he here now?"

"No."

"Gone?"

"Yes, last night."

"By stage?"

"No, on horseback; did you know him, Wild Bill?"

"I have heard of him, and would have been glad to see him."

"Where has he gone?"

"Don't know."

"Which way did he go?"

"Up in the mountains."

"Not alone?"

"Oh, no; he had a guide."

"Who?"

"Old Buckskin."

"Yes, I have seen him; but tell me, Governor, do you know what brought this lawyer to Poker City?"

"I do not."

"He said he had biz here, and went off with Buckskin."

"Which trail did they take?"

"You don't mean the lawyer harm, I hope, Bill, for he is a prime fellow."

"No, I wish to be of service to him."

"Ah! well, they took the Turkey Roost trail."

"Thank you, Dave. Come and take something."

The "Governor" was not a man to "take a shingle off his own roof" by refusing, so the two adjourned to the bar, which was presided over by a red-headed youth whose real name had been lost sight of under his border *sobriquet* of Carrots.

"Hey, Bill, glad ter see yer," and Carrots extended the tips of his fingers to Wild Bill, and no more, for he had once felt the gripe of that iron hand, and cared not to venture it again.

Hardly had the drinks been disposed of, when the stage horn was heard ringing through the valley, and all in the bar-room stampeded for the hotel piazza.

A moment after up dashed the Overland stage, six-in-hand, and driven by Andy Rush, the crack driver on the road.

Upon each side of the driver sat an individual of striking appearance, as regarded size, looks and general make-up.

They were almost giants in size, weighing fully two hundred and fifty pounds each, measured six feet six inches in their stocking feet, were dressed in buckskin leggins, panther-skin sack coats, in spite of the warm weather, and wore caps of wild-cat skins, the heads in front, the tails hanging down their backs.

Their hair was very long and their beard too, and one was a blonde, the other a brunette.

Their faces were cruel, sinister and brutal,

and as they sprung to the ground from the box, they showed the agility of cats, alighting very easily it seemed in spite of their weight.

They were thoroughly armed, that was evident, and a more savage pair even Poker City did not care to claim as citizens.

"Who in thunder be they?" asked one of the bystanders.

The question was answered by Andy Rush the driver, who called out to the landlord:

"Gov'nor, I has brought yer this trip as hash-eaters, these two pilgrims, as says they is trav'lin' fer fun, an' I told 'em this were ther place ter git all they wanted, an' inside ther hearse ar' a young leddy that are sunshine ter look onter, an' seems out o' place in these heur wild diggin's."

All present were gazing at the two passengers whom Andy had designated as "pilgrims in search of fun," and now they glanced at the coach-door at the fair passenger, just as she placed a small foot upon the step to alight, and seeing which one of the pair of giant amusement seekers, sprung forward to her aid, seized her in his arms and carried her toward the piazza of the hotel to the astonishment of all present.

CHAPTER IX.

AN INSULT RESENTED.

THE huge borderman who had taken the maiden in his arms, in spite of her indignant cry of alarm, was the Brunette of the pair of giants, and he deliberately walked with her to the piazza, and still holding her firmly in his grasp, for she was powerless to resist, said in an insolent tone:

"I charges a kiss from them pretty lips for my services."

As he spoke he deliberately drew the face of the maiden toward his huge, bewhiskered mouth, and would certainly have contaminated her lips with a kiss, when there came a sharp report of a pistol, and the bully uttered a curse and started back, releasing the maiden from his grasp, and who took refuge with a glad cry inside of the door.

"Hold on, my man, for I've got you covered."

The words were uttered in the clear voice of Wild Bill, and a revolver in each hand, covered each one of the giant bullies.

"Durn yer, yer hes declar'd war, hes yer?" yelled the bully, facing Wild Bill, yet seemingly seeing that in the man which prevented him from drawing his revolver and risking a shot, while his companion seemed to feel the same way, for though his hand rested on his weapon, it was not drawn from the holster.

"Yes, I declare war against any brute who insults a woman, and I should have killed you; but instead, I was merciful and merely clipped a piece of your nose off to add to your beauty," was Wild Bill's quiet response.

There was no doubt but that quarter of an inch of the bully's nose had been cut off by Wild Bill's surely aimed bullet; but that it added to the beauty of the giant all doubted.

"You is havin' fun rather suddint, pard."

"I told yer Poker City were ther boss place ter enj'y yerselves," cried Andy Rush, who had dismounted from his box.

"Who are you?" growled the Brunette giant savagely, addressing Wild Bill, and walking to the side of his companion.

"I'll interdoose yer, pard; that are Wild Bill ther Pistol Dead Shot," cried Andy Rush, and it was evident from the start both men gave at the name, that Wild Bill was not unknown to them, at least by reputation. "An' Bill," continued Andy, "these pilgrims are Blonde Bill and Brunette Bill from Montana, an' they hes been cirkilatin' around ther kentry chawin' up leetle folks, so they tells me, an' havin' lots o' fun."

"They was a-pressin' ther notice on ther purty lady on ther way over, an' she give 'em ter onderstan' she didn't want ter hev anything ter say to 'em; but they kep' it up, an' I was too durned skeert of 'em to chip in, so I thanks yer fer amusin' 'em, fer that is what they hes comed heur fer."

"Do you wish to press this matter, or let it drop?" asked Wild Bill, addressing the man he had wounded, and from whose disfigured nose the blood was dripping.

"We are strangers an' you hold ther drop on us, so I says let up," said the man known as Brunette Bill.

"And I say put up yer weepin now, but sail in any other time yer likes," added Blonde Bill.

"I seek no quarrel with either of you, and warn you to seek none with me."

"You go your way, and I'll go mine; but, as I have resented an insult to that lady, I tell you now, if you repeat it even by look, I'll hold you to answer."

As Wild Bill spoke he lowered his revolvers, replaced them in his belt and turned into the hotel where the landlord said:

"The young lady wishes to see you, Bill, in the parlor."

"Tell her I've gone, Dave, for I hate to be thanked," and Bill turned to retreat, when a sweet voice cried:

"But I know you are not gone, sir, and I do so wish to thank you for your kindness to me, an unprotected girl."

Bill's face flushed, as he found he was fairly caught, for the young lady had headed him off in the hall.

He saw before him a face and form which no man could behold once and not wish to see again.

It was a youthful face, with large, dreamy blue eyes, and a form as graceful as a willow.

She was dressed in a dark gray traveling suit, wore a black felt hat, in which was a black ostrich plume, and had across her arm a cloak, and in her hand a satchel, as though she had waited, just as she got out of the stage, to thank the man who had so promptly resented the insult to her.

CHAPTER X.

THE THREAT.

If Wild Bill gazed with undisguised admiration upon the fair face before him, it was certain that the maiden was impressed with his bearing, elegant appearance, and fearlessness.

"I saw your brave act, sir, and I thank you from my heart, though you punished that wretch rather severely."

"Not as much as he deserved, miss, and I was just in time to prevent a deeper insult to you," modestly replied Bill.

"You are certainly a wonderful shot, sir, and a bold one, to attempt what you did for the bullet was within two inches of my face," and the maiden seemed to wish to continue the conversation.

"Ah! in this country a man has to be a dead shot, miss, or lose his life, for desperate games are played here for life and death every day."

"And you seem to have won the games you have played against death?" she said inquiringly, and with a smile.

"It is because I always hold trumps, miss."

She seemed mystified, and seeing it, he said:

"I always play to win, whatever the game may be, miss, and pistols are trumps with me, and I am happy to say my two sixes generally win no matter what is played against them."

"But I meant not to boast, and will not detain you; but my name is Hikok, and if those rascals annoy you any more, just send for me."

"One moment, Mr. Hikok."

Wild Bill hesitated.

"What was the name you were called by the driver?"

"Wild Bill they call me."

"Are you the Wild Bill who has won such a famous name as a scout in Kansas, and along the border?"

"I have been a scout, miss, but now I am a ranchero," suddenly replied Bill.

"Now I have seen you, I do not wonder that men tell strange stories of your deeds."

"I expected to see, if I ever met you, a man not unlike the one who insulted me; but I find in Wild Bill the Pistol Dead Shot a true man, and a gentleman."

Wild Bill bowed low, and again started to leave the parlor, when again the maiden detained him.

"One moment, please."

"I came here on an important mission, and am alone and friendless."

"This is no place for such as I am, well I know; but I am impelled by duty in coming here, and I need some one to aid and advise me."

"I have money, and am able to pay for services rendered, and I ask you to continue to be my friend, and I will make known to you the secret of my coming."

"I will do all I can, miss, and—"

"My name is Edna Insley, sir."

"Well, Miss Insley, command my services in anyway you wish, but remember, I serve you not for pay."

"Nor would I ask you to, only there will be expenses incurred in serving me, which I will defray; but I detain you now, I fear."

"Is it urgent that I act for you at once?" asked Wild Bill in a meditative way.

"No, not for several days, if you have other engagements."

"I have something to do that will keep me for a few days, and perhaps a week, and I intend starting at dawn to attend to it."

"Upon my return I will be wholly at leisure."

"Then I will wait until you return, Mr. Hikok; but if disengaged this evening, I will make known to you my mission here, and then perhaps you can settle upon some plan that is best for me to follow."

Wild Bill promised to see her after supper, and left the parlor, going into the bar, where Carrots was busy with the two Giant Bills, as already the huge pair had been christened in Poker City.

"Bill, I wants yer ter drink with me," cried Andy Bush, the driver, as he espied Wild Bill, and drawing him up to one end of the bar he continued in a low tone:

"All ther way over I were a-prayin' that you might be in Poker City an' them two pick you up for a row, an' my prayer were answered."

"Yer see they has been terrers all through ther up kentry, an' I were warned, when I took 'em on ther hearse that ther boys of Poker City had better look out."

"I tell yer they hes tarned toes up ter ther daisies in every town they hes been, an' I never expected ter see 'em wilt as they did ter-day."

"But they hes horse sense, an' they see you were dead sure of 'em ef they didn't squ'al, an' so they squole; but yer keep yer eye on 'em, Bill boy, fer they means yer mischief, fer they hes already said, that ter-morrer they will drive yer out o' this camp."

"Now ther are ther Giant Bills threat, an' I warns yer."

Well, they may do it, Andy, for they are ugly customers to deal with, I am certain," and with a light laugh Wild Bill turned away and went in to dinner, which was by no means a commonplace meal at the Ranchero's Exchange.

By the time he had finished his dinner he had been visited by a dozen friends, and received as many wretchedly scrawled notes, all telling him that the Giants had made the threat to drive him out of Poker City the next day.

CHAPTER XI.

EDNA INSLEY'S MISSION TO POKER CITY.

TRUE to his promise, Wild Bill sent word to the fair guest of the Ranchero's Exchange, that he was ready to see her.

Her coming had mystified the citizens of Poker City immensely, and all the miner swells and young shopkeepers, not to speak of the cowboys, who were quite numerous in the vicinity, had visited the hotel in the hope of seeing her.

The fame of her beauty had spread like wild-fire, and also the act of Wild Bill, and the pair of strangers had come in for their share of talk, and the result was that Carrots was kept busy dispensing spirits to those who were athirst.

Now, the Exchange was by no means a grand hotel in any sense of the word, for it was built of boards, and was not even an imposing structure, but it was a comfortable tavern for that wild land, its table was good, and some of its rooms that pretended to luxury were at least not uncomfortable.

Edna Insley had been given the star chamber, which was a bedroom and small cuddly, designated a parlor, attached.

Into this private parlor Wild Bill was ushered, and he found the maiden looking more beautiful than ever in a pretty wrapper, which she had exchanged for her house dress.

"Be seated, Mr. Hikok, and first let me tell you that the chambermaid says those two wretches have openly threatened to drive you from Poker City to-morrow," said the maiden somewhat anxiously.

Wild Bill smiled and answered:

"Their threat has been repeated to me by many, Miss Insley, and, as I leave before day-break, they may have the credit of driving me off—until my return."

There was a significance in the last three words of the ranchero which Edna Insley could not fail to see, and she gave a slight shudder, but answered:

"Well, as you seem wholly capable of taking care of yourself, I will only say be careful."

"Now, let me tell you why I am here."

"I will gladly listen, miss."

"Did you ever hear of a miner in this region by the name of Anson Boyd?"

"I do not remember such a name, though I have not lived very long on this part of the frontier, Miss Insley."

"I believe he was known as Old Moonlight, as he was wont to work all day and on moonlight nights too."

"Ah, I have heard such a name spoken of among the miners, and believe that he died in the mountains."

"So it was said; he had a pard, as they call comrades here, known as Prince Harry, from his elegance even in miner dress."

"I have heard of him too, and he is now living in some Indian village, I believe, as it is unhealthy for a man of his constitution in Poker City."

"Mr. Hikok, that is the man I am in search of," said Edna, earnestly.

Wild Bill looked his surprise, but said nothing.

"You wonder why I should wish to find a renegade?"

"I do wonder at it," was the frank reply.

"Well, I will explain by telling you that Andy Boyd was my father."

"Your father?"

"Yes; his name was Andy Boyd Insley, and he dropped his last name in coming here."

"When I was but fourteen years of age, now five years ago, my father, who was a merchant, was ruined in business by his partner, and we were left poor."

"Unable to behold my poor mother and myself in poverty, my noble father left us one night secretly, and then we found, from a letter sent us the following day, that he had gone West to try and dig a fortune for us out of the mines."

"He left us just enough to live on, and said he would return in three or four years."

"The gold fever here was then at its height, as you may remember, Mr. Hikok, and my father struck a good lead, and soon wrote that he was doing splendidly."

"He sent us money from time to time and we changed our humble quarters for better ones, and I went to a fashionable boarding-school."

"A year ago my father wrote that he had amassed a large fortune, had sent his partner for wagons, and they were to come East and bring their gold."

"That partner was Prince Hal, who had saved my father's life one day, and thus had bound him to him in bonds of gratitude and friendship."

"Some time passed away and then my mother and myself received a visitor."

"Who should it be but Prince Hal, who gave his real name as Henry Hammond."

"And a bitter story he had to tell of a robbery of the wagon-train by mountain-robbers, the killing of my poor father, and his escape only by accident, after being wounded."

"He gave us some money, which he said had belonged to my father, and been on deposit in a border town, and neither my mother or myself had reason to doubt his story."

"He was a man of fascinating manners, considerably older than myself, and after a few weeks' acquaintance asked me to become his wife."

"I admired the man, yet did not love him and told him so; but he was urgent, my mother seemed anxious to have me marry him, for she was an invalid, and I told him I would give him my answer on the morrow."

"That night my mother awakened from a sound sleep with a ringing shriek, and springing to her side I found her gasping for breath and bleeding at the lungs."

"Hurriedly I sent a servant for our physician, and then heard from her lips that she had had a fearful dream, and had seen Henry Hammond killing my father in a lonely mountain pass."

"The struggle to aid him, in her sleep, had been too much for her weak frame, and had brought on the hemorrhage which caused her death, for she died soon after the physician arrived."

"The next day Henry Hammond called and I told him all, and told him to leave me forever."

"Then the tiger in his nature broke out and he swore and threatened in the very presence

of my poor dead mother, until I told him I would have him arrested and tried for the charge, for I would have detectives sent to the mines to look up the facts."

"That caused him to leave me, and I have not seen him since."

"But some weeks ago I picked up a frontier paper and saw where Prince Hal, a miner, had been implicated in robbing a stage, and was discovered to be one of a gang of road-agents."

"Then the belief that my mother's dream was true took full possession of me, and Mr. Hikok, I have come here to find out if he is the murderer of my father, and if so, to seek revenge."

"And you shall have it, Miss Insley, for I will find this Prince Hal for you, and wring from him a confession of what was the true fate of your father," said Wild Bill earnestly.

"Only wait patiently my return, and while in Poker City keep out of the way of the giants."

"Good-night."

So saying, Wild Bill left the room, and half an hour before dawn he was riding out of Poker City, and following the Turkey Roost Trail to the mountains.

CHAPTER XII.

OLD BUCKSKIN ON THE TRAIL.

"PARD, we has got ter a place where we has ter part comp'ny."

The speaker was Old Buckskin, and the one he addressed was Mark Manning, the St. Louis lawyer.

The two had drawn rein at what seemed the end of a small canyon, for before them was a towering cliff, and upon either side were walls of rock rising a hundred feet in height, and running back to the entrance, half a mile distant.

The tops of the cliffs were fringed with mountain pines, and the canyon below, about a hundred feet wide, was covered with a carpet of luxuriant grass, through the center of which was a rivulet, that came from a spring under the rocks.

Under the shelter of the head of the canyon, and surrounded by a thicket of trees that hid it from view, until close up to it, was a log cabin.

It was stoutly built of logs against the wall of rock, and had but one room, twelve by twenty feet in size.

Two small windows in front, and one at either end of the cabin, commanded the approaches to it up the canyon, and the door was just wide enough for a man to pass through, and so low that he would have to stoop.

"Who lives there?" asked Mark Manning, pointing to the cabin.

"When I are thar, I lives thar; when I hain't I don't."

"But it are my cabin, an' you are welcome to make it yourn until I return with ther gal."

"It is by no means an uncomfortable place, I assure you, and my horse will also fare well, from the looks of the grass."

"Yas, he'll not starve, an' fer a fact you won't nuther, as I keeps a good supply o' grub in ther shanty."

The two men now dismounted, lariated their horses out, hung up their saddles, and in a short time Old Buckskin had his cabin thrown open, a fire built, and a good dinner cooking, for he had brought game with him.

After the meal the two sat down for a talk, and Old Buckskin said:

"Now, Fard Ly'yer, we parts heur fer a leetle time, fer I hes ter go on alone ter ther Injun camp."

"You stay heur, an' I'll jine yer with ther gal, unless I goes under in ther trip, an' then yer'll excuse me, I knows, fer yer'll most likely hev ter die too, fer no man kin find his way back ther way we come, unless he were born in these heur mountains, or are a man as knows ther woods an' plains same as you knows legal dokimints."

"Now I hes a pard in these heur mountings, who are a pale-face, as loves ther solitudes better than popylation, fer reasons he keeps ter hisself."

"Now he are friendly with the Injuns, an' I looks ter him ter help me git ther gal, an' ef I should hev to wait round a leetle, he'll fetch yer ther gal an' guide yer to ther overland, whar you kin git a stage as will hustle yer towards St. Louis."

"I care not who brings the girl, Buckskin,

Wild Bill's Trump Card.

so that I can see her and convince her of the fortune in store for her, and urge that she goes to St. Louis with me to obtain possession of it."

"Waal, she hev got a level head, an' ef she don't see that Wild Bill ter talk her out o' it, she'll go all right."

"Who is this friend of yours?"

"Waal, ther Injuns calls him Lone Pale-face, but in ther settlements, where he ust ter go, they calls him Han'some Hugh, an' that is ther han'le I gives him."

"Handsome Hugh; then he may be a dangerous man for the Red Dove to be trusted with."

"Nary, fer he are as gentle as a kitten, ef yer don't rub him ag'in' ther fur."

"I may fetch ther gal myself, but as I hest git him ter help me see her, he bein' mor' friendly with ther Injuns, I may find it convenient ter sen' him with ther Dove."

"Now I'll be off, an' you kin jist content yerself heur."

"Thar is game round about, an' thar is fishin' in ther streams, an' I guesses yer'll not starve."

Ten minutes after Old Buckskin mounted his horse and rode away, leaving Mark Manning alone, and indeed a stranger in a strange land.

CHAPTER XIII.

RED DOVE.

THE village of Black Bear was situated in the very heart of the mountains, and in fastnesses where neither soldiers or hostile tribes would dare attempt to attack him.

The chief was a man of natural genius, and for twenty long years had led his warriors to victory in battle, marches and retreats.

Peaceful when allowed to be, he was an implacable foe to the pale-face and Indian when imposed upon, and had won the respect and dread of all his enemies.

In the selection of a site for his village he had chosen a spot of remarkable beauty and grandeur, as well as one calculated to give support to his people and pasture for his horses.

There were limpid streams flowing through the village, out of which the most delicious fish could be caught, and the mountains abounded with deer, elk, antelope, and the adjacent plains with buffalo.

Then there were bears, wolves and panthers for furs, and the supply seemed never to be exhausted.

Taught by poor Lou Loring, his white wife, many little ideas of civilization, he had built for himself a cabin of stout logs, and it was furnished in no mean way, through the skill of Red Dove and Iron Eyes, his children, while his Indian wife had done much to help along in the general advancement.

A plot back of the cabin was worked as a garden, and others of his tribe following his example in house-building, the village of Man-ta-pa-ka, which being interpreted means Home of Rest, was by no means an unpleasant place in which to dwell, while in point of law and order it was certainly ahead of the festive town of the pale-faces, known as Poker City.

Taught English by her mother, and to read and write French, by a Canadian Missionary, Red Dove had by no means grown up in ignorance, for she had read many books which the Indians, in their numerous raids had brought home with them, regarding them as sacred relics.

The only one of her tribe who could read, having mastered the art of playing the guitar, her mother's, which Captain Loring, with many other things, had sent his sacrificed daughter, to cheer her desolate hours, possessed of a weirdly beautiful voice, being able to write and sketch the surrounding scenery to perfection, and draw likenesses of the various chiefs, it was no wonder that Red Dove was regarded in the light of a queen, especially when she was the child of the great chief Black Bear.

Frequently had she gone on hunts, and even the war-path, with her half-brother Iron Eyes, and his one hundred young warriors, none of whom had reached the legal age of white voters in the East, and her horsemanship was wonderful, her aim deadly, and in hurling a knife and throwing a lasso none could excel her.

Whether it was the white blood in her veins that seemed to urge her on continually, I cannot tell; but certain it is, that with her comfortable home, her power as a queen, her

numerous accomplishments, she never seemed happy far down in her heart.

Attracting the attention of a renegade white man, known by his deeds as Robin Red Breast, the fate of Red Dove might have been a sad one, but for her rescue by Wild Bill.

But from that day of rescue the poor Indian girl seemed to lose her heart, which went out in all its warmth of affection toward the famous scout, and felt many a little ache, when she saw that he seemed not to love her in return.

He had saved her life, her honor, and again rescued her from the designing villain in whose charge she had started to St. Louis, to solve the truth, or falsehood, of her inheritance.

And yet her beautiful face seemed but to have won his admiration and regard, and never touched the depths of his heart.

She was too womanly to show him how deeply she loved him; but then he seemed blind to her every action toward him, and look.

Back to her mountain village she had gone, after the interruption of her trip to the East, and, to drown thought, and soothe heartaches she had been constantly on the go, by the side of her brother, Iron Eyes, and at the head of the band of young warriors, which his powers and pluck had made him chief of, young as he was.

One day the band had started upon an extensive hunt, and Red Dove, with woman's fickleness of nature, which can be found in the tepee of the Indian, as well as in the palaces of the metropolis, refused at the last minute to go, through some caprice.

Away then Iron Eyes and his band started for the plains, and hardly had they been gone an hour before Red Dove grew very lonesome.

Her father, the Black Bear, was in the Council Tepee, with the head chiefs, and there seemed nothing for her to do.

She tried to work on a pair of moccasins she was making, but soon cast them aside.

Then she took up a pair of leggings, she was fringing for herself, and that work did not suit her.

Beading a buckskin waist for herself was tiresome also, and it too was cast aside.

Her guitar caught her eye and she tried to sing a little French song the priest had taught her, but the words were of love, the air plaintive, and it choked her with the emotion welling up in her throat.

Impatiently she cast the guitar aside and putting on her hunting costume, and telling her step-mother that she was going to follow on the trail of the hunters and overtake them, she caught her spotted pony, and seizing her rifle and belt of arms, she sprung into the saddle and darted away like the wind.

She readily struck the hunters' trail and was following it at a slow canter, when suddenly, while passing through a gorge in the rocks, she was confronted by a horseman.

Instantly she brought her rifle around ready for use; but the horseman raised his hands above his head, the palms turned toward her, and said:

"I mean the Red Dove no harm."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TEMPTER.

THE horseman who so suddenly confronted the Red Dove, and in a spot where she had little dreamed of meeting any one, other than from her own tribe, was a man of striking appearance.

His face was darkly bronzed by long exposure to the elements, and he had a black mustache and imperial, very long black hair, and dark, earnest, fascinating eyes.

He seemed young at first glance, and yet had evidently passed his fortieth year.

His form was tall, elegant, denoting strength and quickness of action, and he was dressed in a corduroy hunting suit of dark brown, the pants stuck in top-boots, the heels of which were armed with spurs.

A large, soft hat sheltered his head, a belt of arms encircled his waist, beneath his hunting jacket, and a rifle was strapped behind him on the saddle.

"What does the Lone Pale-face want with the Red Dove, that he stands in her path?" asked the maiden quietly, appearing to recognize the horseman.

"The Lone Pale-face comes from the friend of the Red Dove," he answered in soft tones.

"The Red Dove has many friends."

"True; but she has one who looks to her good more than others, and he has sent the Lone Pale-face to tell her to come to him."

"Who is this friend?"

"Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot"

The bronzed face of Red Dove flushed at the name, and a glad light flashed in her eyes.

But she said quietly:

"Why did not the ranchero come himself to see the Red Dove?"

"He could not, for he has a friend from the great city with him, and who has come to tell the Red Dove that the father of her mother is dead, and has left her gold to make her richer than her whole tribe."

"The Red Dove has enough to eat, warm furs to sleep on, a wooden tepee to shelter her, ponies, clothing and all she needs."

"She cares not for gold, that the white man fights for, toils for, and dies to get."

"You are the first one I ever struck that didn't want gold," muttered the man; but he said aloud:

"The Red Dove has the blood of the pale-face in her veins, and her mother came from the land of the rising sun."

"With the gold that is hers she can go to the birth-home of her mother's people, in the great cities of the pale faces, and do much good for the tribe of the Black Bear."

"If she refuses the gold, she can but linger out here in these wild mountains, and when she is grown older be buried in the canyon."

"The pale-faces march onward, and the red-men go to their graves; but, with gold, the Red Dove can help her people here, and save them much sorrow."

The tone of the man was soft and insinuating, and his earnest eyes were bent upon her as he spoke.

It was evident she was impressed by the picture he had drawn, for she asked:

"Where is the Dead Shot?"

"At his home, the Haunted Ranch, with the friend of the Red Dove, who has come from the city of the pale-faces."

For a moment the Indian girl gazed searchingly into the face of the white man, as though to read his thoughts through his dark eyes.

But he met the gaze unflinchingly, and she said:

"The Lone Pale-face hides here in these hills, the home of the red-man, from his people, and goes not to the camps of the white men; but he has done no wrong against my people, that I know, and I will trust him, though the Black Bear, my father, who saw him once, said he believed he was a snake in the grass."

"The chief Black Bear was unkind to me," said the white man, in an injured tone.

"He may have been, but he said the face of the Lone Pale-face came before his eyes like a cloud that drifts up from the past."

"But I will trust the Lone Pale-face, and we will see if the Black Bear was wrong in calling him a snake."

There was a flash of joy in the eyes of the man, but he made no reply, and, placing himself by her side, the two rode on together, their track leading toward the south and the Haunted Ranch where Wild Bill made his home.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DOVE AND THE SERPENT.

AFTER he was left alone by Old Buckskin, Mark Manning felt most keenly his situation.

He was far from the nearest camp of his own race, in the heart of mountains through which roamed the most savage of wild beasts, and where at any moment a human foe, in the shape of Indians, might come upon him.

He had his rifle and pistols, his cabin was a strong one, and ample food was about him, it was true, but, should aught happen to Old Buckskin, how would he, unaided, find his way back to the settlements?

He was a brave man, and had confidence in himself; but he was not a plainsman or a mountaineer, and knew how powerless he was to save himself, should he be discovered by Indians.

But, after one night passed alone, he became more easy in mind, and enjoyed himself the next day in hunting for game.

The following night passed in undisturbed silence, save the howling of the wolves, and hooting of an owl, that had perched himself upon the roof of the cabin to toll forth his doleful notes.

The next day he fished in the streams, and was delighted at his luck.

But while at his dinner he was startled by the sound of hoof-falls, and glancing down the valley saw two persons approaching on horseback.

One was a man who was a stranger to him.

The other was a young girl, whose splendid, barbaric costume, and darkly-bronzed face he felt must be the Red Dove, the Indian Heiress, to whom he had risked his life in coming to the border.

"By Heaven, it is the girl! but who is the man?" he cried, springing to his feet and confronting them as they drew rein in front of the cabin.

"Do I see Mr. Mark Manning?" asked the stranger politely.

"My name is Manning, sir," answered the lawyer.

"I am the friend of Old Buckskin—"

"Ah!"

"And men call me Handsome Hugh, and among the Indians I am known as Lone Pale-face."

"I know now who you are, sir, for Buckskin said he would send you if he did not return himself, but where is he?"

"He was detained, and asked me to take his place."

"It is just as well, sir.

"This then is the Red Dove, the fair Indian queen?

"Permit me to aid you to dismount," and Mark Manning, with the courtly grace natural to him advanced to the side of Red Dove.

With eager eyes she had listened to the conversation, her brow clouding, and her dark eyes flashing, for she had now begun to feel that she had been led into some snare by the Lone Pale-face.

As Mark Manning advanced toward her, she suddenly cried:

"The Black Bear's tongue was straight, for the Lone Pale-face is a snake in the grass."

As she spoke she suddenly reined her horse back, and turned to fly.

But, as though anticipating some such move on her part, her white companion had taken his lasso in hand, and sent it flying through the air, ere the Indian pony had made a second bound.

His well trained horse has prepared himself instantly to meet the shock, and the noose settling down over the head of the spotted mustang brought him to the ground with a heavy fall, throwing the Indian girl over his head.

She fell upon her knees, but ere she could spring to her feet Handsome Hugh had jumped from his horse, and bounding forward, caught her in his strong arms, while he cried:

"No, my sweet Dove, you cannot fly away from us."

All this had transpired in an instant, and before the astonished Manning could interpose a word or act.

He was not in the habit of seeing persons of any sex have to be caught with lariats in order to get them to take fortunes left them, and as the horseman approached holding the indignant Red Dove in his strong arms, he cried:

"Hold, sir! is this force necessary to get the maiden to remain?"

"You would think so, if she could get back and tell that savage father of hers," was the response.

"But my dear girl, I mean you no harm, but on the contrary I have come a long way to do you a service," said Mark Manning kindly.

"The Red Dove wishes to go to the village of her people.

"She trusted that man, for he said he would lead her to a friend, the great white ranchero, and he has been a snake in the grass.

"See, he has thrown her pony to the ground with a lariat, and now has her in his power, and she is alone, for you are not her friend."

The young girl spoke indignantly, and the lawyer answered:

"Listen to me, Red Dove, and I will prove to you that I am your friend."

"Will you sit there and hear me, if the Lone Pale-face releases you?"

"No, the Red Dove will not hear," she firmly said.

"Pard, there is but one thing to do, and that I know," said Handsome Hugh.

"And that is—"

"To bind the girl and leave at once for the lower settlements."

"Once you get her away from hope of rescue from her people, and she will listen to you quietly, and go with you."

"But here she will not."

"Will the Red Dove not go quietly with me, without being bound?" asked Manning.

"No! let the Red Dove fly back to her home in the village of her people."

"You see, so let us lose no time."

"Get those wide buckskin straps from my saddle, and I will tie her so the thongs will not hurt her."

Mark Manning seemed reluctant to bind the girl; but then he had risked much to get her into his possession, and did not care to lose her.

He saw that she would be a dangerous person at liberty, and she had already shown how willingly she would take chances to escape, so he said:

"Well, if the Red Dove will not promise to go with me, I must let you tie her."

"The Red Dove makes no promises to those she hates," was the spiteful reply.

Without further parley Handsome Hugh tied her arms securely behind her back, and then the cabin was closed up, and mounting, the party started for the lower settlements, Lone Pale-face being the guide.

That night the three camped in a canyon, and Mark Manning, to win the confidence of the Indian girl, told her all about her inheritance.

He spoke of her beautiful mother, and her marriage with the Black Bear, the wanderings of her pale-face grandfather, Captain Loring, and his death upon the banks of the Mississippi, and of his killing the murderer, and being appointed by the captain to give to the Red Dove the gold that he left.

He told her how he had buried her pale-face grandfather in honor, and then, neglecting his own affairs, had come to the Far West to seek her.

He had risked his life to find her, and they had told him she would not leave her wild life to get her gold.

But he had determined to let her see the great cities in the land of the rising sun, give to her the gold that was her own, and then, if the Red Dove wished to return to her red people in the mountains, she could do so.

The young girl listened without a word to all that was said in perfect silence, and then Mark Manning asked:

"Does the Red Dove not believe now that I am her friend?"

"Do pale-faces bind the arms of their friends, and drag them from their homes and their people?"

"It is for your good, Red Dove."

"The Red Dove is happy as she was."

"Let her go back to her father."

"Not until I have kept my pledge to your dying grandfather," was the firm response of Mark Manning, and almost discouraged he turned away from the red-skin heiress.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DOUBLE GAME.

THE next afternoon Handsome Hugh went into camp early, as he said there was no other good place on the trail for many miles.

In riding, Red Dove, at Mark Manning's suggestion had had her arms free of the thongs, and had only been bound to the saddle, so as not to make her any more uncomfortable than was necessary to guard against an attempt at escape.

But when they halted, they were forced to secure her beyond possibility of getting away.

In various ways Mark Manning had tried to win her confidence, and prove himself her friend; but she kept a stolid, silent manner toward him, and he could not tell what was passing in her thoughts.

"Once I get her where she has to depend wholly upon me, it will be all right," he said to Handsome Hugh.

The place chosen for the camp was in a clump of timber, and where several large boulders made shelters against the wind.

The horses had not yet been lariated out to feed, and Red Dove had just been helped to the ground by Mark Manning, when Handsome Hugh approached, after having hitched the animals, and said:

"Pard, don't you think this is a one sided game you are playing?"

It was the manner of the man, rather than his words, that caused Mark Manning to look up in surprise.

"I repeat; don't your conscience tell you that this is all one-sided?"

"I don't understand you, sir," said the law-

yer, nettled by the sinister manner of the other.

"I will explain so that you shall."

"What do I get out of this little affair?"

"You mean that you want pay for your services?" hotly said Manning.

"I do."

"Then you shall have pay; but having paid Old Buckskin once, I deemed that he settled with you."

"You thought wrong, pard."

"I collect my own dues."

"Well, this is no time to dun me for money."

"It is the very time."

"Complete your task and I will pay you."

"What task?"

"Guide me to the nearest station where I can get a stage-coach."

"We are going from the Overland line, pard, and not to it," was the cool reply.

Mark Manning turned pale with anger and said hotly:

"What do you mean, villain?"

"Be sparing with your epithets, for I am no man to brook them, and you are in no condition to be insulting."

"Your words have some deeper meaning than I can see through."

"I mean that I have led you into the heart of the Indian country, and I doubt if even the Red Dove could find her way back."

"Then I shall, as her friend, be protected, while you shall suffer," sneeringly said Mark Manning.

"As usual you fail to understand, my dear Mr. Manning."

"This is not the country of the tribe to which the Red Dove belongs, but of the bitterest foes to that tribe, as she will tell you."

"Is this true, Red Dove?" and Manning turned to the young girl, who answered calmly:

"For once, the Lone Face has not spoken crooked."

"By Heaven you shall rue this act, man."

"You are in no position to threaten, Lawyer Manning," was Handsome Hugh's quiet rejoinder.

"In the name of the saints, what means your treachery?"

"I made no pledges to you, and I only seek to benefit myself."

"Then name your price."

"First, what is the amount that this girl inherits?"

"That is none of your affair."

"Then I will not move from this spot until I know, and I again tell you we are in deadly danger here."

"And you will suffer too."

"On the contrary, I am a chief in this tribe."

"A renegade?" sneered Manning.

"Yes."

"A confessed one?"

"Yes."

"If ever man deserved the halter you do."

"We are not in St. Louis, my friend, and you are not appealing to a jury, but before one man, who can be your executioner."

This remark Mark Manning seemed to clearly see the truth of, for he said sullenly:

"I asked you to name your terms?"

"And I asked you the amount of this girl's inheritance?"

"I refuse to tell."

"Then I refuse to guide you further, and your life, and hers, be on your head."

As he spoke Handsome Hugh turned away, as though to mount his horse.

"Hold!"

"Well?"

"I cover you with my revolver, and if you do not return and swear to guide me to the Overland in safety, I will kill you, for I shall make this a game that two can play instead of one."

One glance into the face of Mark Manning found that he meant every word he uttered.

CHAPTER XVII.

A RENEGADE'S TERMS.

INSTEAD of cowering before his aim, as he had expected him to do, believing, as a double-dyed villain he must be a coward, and thereby making the mistake that many do, Mark Manning was astonished to see Handsome Hugh burst into ringing laughter at his threat.

"What! do you dare me?"

"Yes."

"I am a dead shot."

"I doubt it."

"Beware, for patience is ceasing to be a virtue, and if I kill you, the Red Dove can be guide."

"What do you wish?"

"Pledge yourself to guide me to the Overland."

"And the Red Dove?"

"Goes with me."

"If I refuse?"

"I shall kill you."

"You mean it?"

"So help me Heaven."

"Then I refuse."

"And I fire!"

As he spoke the hand of Mark Manning touched the trigger, the hammer fell, the explosion followed, but the man upon whom he had deadly aim neither flinched or fell.

"I told you that I doubted you being a dead shot," sneered Handsome Hugh.

Again the crack of the revolver followed, and with a like result.

"Do you pledge yourself now, for I will not miss every time?"

"No."

"Then you die."

Again the pistol flashed, once, twice, thrice, in rapid succession, and yet no sign of a wound upon the daring man who stood sneeringly before the weapon, and not ten paces away.

"You have one more shot, try that," was the taunt.

"I will."

And, for the sixth time, Mark Manning pulled trigger, and, as before, without result.

"There is no need of your wasting your powder, so you need not draw your second weapon, as it too is unloaded."

"Unloaded?" gasped Manning.

"Yes; I extracted all the bullets while you slept last night; but my weapons are loaded, and you are now in my power, for a turn about is fair play."

Quickly his hand went to his hip, and his revolver sprung to a level.

Mark Manning saw that he was fairly caught. He had been outwitted by a desperate and designing villain, and was in his power.

"Now, Mr. Manning, it is for me to dictate terms, and again I ask you what is the amount of inheritance left that girl?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"To gauge the price I ask you thereby."

"Well, it amounts to something under a quarter of a million."

"Indeed! a large sum."

"I always knew that the old captain salted away his gold, but had no idea he had accumulated so much."

"You knew Captain Loring, then?"

"I did."

"Well, now you know, what are your terms?"

"The same as your terms."

"Mine?"

"Yes."

"What mean you?"

"Are you serving this pretty Indian heiress for nothing?"

"No; her grandfather left me a handsome sum as a fee, with expenses for looking her up."

"Who is the executor of the will?"

"I am."

"You hold the entire property for her?"

"Yes."

"Who is her guardian?"

"She is her own."

"She is not seventeen, and her Indian father would make a healthy old guardian in legal matters."

"I mean until she is of age."

"The will makes me her guardian until she is eighteen, when her property goes into her hands."

"I thought so."

"Now what do you get for all this?"

"I told you the will left me my fee and expenses."

"Practice good in St. Louis?" sneered Lone Face.

"My practice is good enough to support me, and I can live among honest men, which you cannot do, being a subject for the hangman," hotly said the lawyer.

The face of Handsome Hugh flushed and then paled; but he said with provoking calmness:

"I asked you what you got for all this?"

"And I told you how I was paid."

"Let me tell you your terms."

"First, you hold the property, and have no idea of giving it up."

"Legally you cannot keep it, unless you do something to make it your own."

"That something is to marry the Indian Heiress, send her to boarding-school, and bring her out in a couple of years as a rival belle to the St. Louis belles."

"You are a villain that I yet hope to hang," hissed Mark Manning, hoarse with passion, at the words of the other.

As for Red Dove she stood like a statue gazing upon the two men, and her eyes only moving from the face of one to that of the other.

Not a movement of her beautiful countenance showed she heard, or was interested in their conversation, and yet not a word escaped her little ears.

"Will you tell me your terms, and end this?" asked Mark Manning, almost enraged beyond control, at the sinister, sneering, smiling face of the man before him, and who held him still under the muzzle of his revolver.

"Yes, my terms are to marry the girl."

The threatening revolver alone prevented the lawyer from springing upon the man who so coolly made known the terms he demanded.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A GAME IN WHICH PISTOLS ARE TRUMPS.

"DEVIL! what do you mean?" cried Mark Manning, as he glared upon the cool face of the man known as Handsome Hugh, and whose looks did not belie the name.

"Just what I say, Manning."

"That you demand that this young girl become your wife, in payment for your services as guide?"

"You put it exactly."

"How dare you make such a base proposition?"

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and I am looking out for myself."

"The Red Dove being my wife will not prevent her inheritance of her fortune, and, as her husband, I can urge that she go to St. Louis and attend boarding-school, and can place her under other guardianship than yours."

"Also, I will put the matter in the hands of lawyers, and make you disgorge her wealth, and, when she gets it in her possession, I will come for her, and we can then be happy together, for I speak her tongue, I am a roamer of the mountains and plains like her people, and can and will be to her all that a husband should be, and devote my every energy to the improvement and comfort of her tribe."

"I knew her father, and knew her mother years ago, and I love her."

"Can you bring stronger claims?"

"Yes."

"Name them."

"I am an honorable man."

"And I?"

"Are a desperado, a hunted renegade, and a villain."

The words were said boldly, and again the dark face of Handsome Hugh flushed.

"You haven't been found out yet, Manning."

"That is the only difference between us," he said, quietly.

"This is idle nonsense, this talk, so if you want money, and it is within my means, I will pay it," said Mark Manning.

"I have told you my terms."

"And to them I will not listen."

"We can go to a missionary priest I know in a tribe to the north of this, and he can marry us, and—"

"I say no."

"You mean my terms are too great?"

"Yes."

"They are the same as your own."

It may be that the renegade hit the truth, for the face of the lawyer flushed at his words.

"I would rather see her dead than your wife."

"She may die yet before she reaches St. Louis with you, especially if there is a codicil in that will that, in case of Red Dove's death, you are the next heir."

"I am no murderer, man, to kill for gold, as you doubtless have done."

"When you come to need gold, crave it, as I have done, you may kill, too," was the savage reply.

Then, regaining his calm, sinister manner at once, he continued:

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

"Will you take the girl and pledge me the fortune, then?"

"It is not mine to pledge, as you know."

"Then there is but one way to decide this matter."

"How is that?"

"It is a way I have of deciding all things for or against myself."

"Well?"

"Do you play cards?"

"Yes."

"You have gambled?"

"Yes."

"Are you an expert player?"

"I am."

"So am I."

"What has this to do with the matter?"

"I will play you a game for the girl and her fortune."

"Nonsense."

"I say yes, for if you win I will guide you to the Overland in safety."

"If you lose, I marry the girl, you pledge yourself to take care of her until she is of age, and then to turn over her fortune to me."

"I will not agree."

"So help me Heaven, Mr. Manning, this is your only way out of this trouble; for, if you refuse, I take the girl, kill you, make her my wife, and go to St. Louis and claim the fortune of my bride."

Mark Manning saw that the man was in deadly earnest, and, always noted as a good and successful card-player, he said:

"Well, I accept your offer; have you cards?"

"Oh, yes! they are implements of my profession, and I never go without them, any more than I would without arms."

He took a pack of cards from an inner pocket, as he spoke, and continued:

"Come, Red Dove, I'll make sure of you before we begin."

He led her, unresisting, to a tree, and bound her to it.

Then he walked to where a tree had been blown down by the wind, and took a seat upon it, his feet upon either side.

With a pale, stern face Mark Manning followed, and seated himself opposite to him.

The cards were then carefully shuffled, cut and dealt, and the game began.

It was to be the best two in three games, so as to give to each a more equal chance.

Both men played slowly, and the first game was won by Mark Manning.

His face flushed at his triumph, but Handsome Hugh showed no emotion.

Another deal, and the second game was played through in the same deliberate manner, and was won by Lone Face.

His face was as immovable as before, but Mark Manning's paled slightly.

Then for the first time Red Dove showed deep interest, and she bent her head eagerly forward to watch the players.

The third game was begun, played slowly through, and at last Lone Face cried exultantly, as he threw down a card:

"Diamonds are trumps, and I win the heiress!"

But just then a dark shadow fell upon them, and a ringing voice was heard:

"Hold! Pistols are trumps in this game of deviltry, and Wild Bill plays them!"

A cry of horror burst from the lips of each man, and they beheld, standing upon the rock above them, and his revolvers covering their hearts, the tall form of the Pistol Dead Shot.

CHAPTER XIX.

WILD BILL TO THE FRONT.

To describe the amazement of the two men, and also of Red Dove, at the sudden appearance of Wild Bill upon the scene, would be utterly impossible.

His coming, to Handsome Hugh, was even a greater surprise than to Mark Manning, for he had little dreamed of the appearance of the daring ranchero in that locality, and at a moment so very inopportune to him.

As for Mark Manning he was taken aback, not dreaming of a white man's presence anywhere in that vicinity, and yet, though at first fearful of trouble, he was the next instant glad of his coming.

He had often heard of the famous frontiersman, and well remembered what Old Buckskin had told him about him, and that he was the avowed friend of Red Dove.

The Indian girl's lips, at sight of her brave defender upon former occasions, and the man she so fondly loved, parted in a cry of joy as she saw him spring upon the rock, and then she became perfectly calm, and contented to let

matters take their course, wholly confident that Wild Bill would regulate them.

That Handsome Hugh was a brave man, there could be no doubt, and one who could use weapons unerringly too.

But he was fairly caught this time and he knew it.

The revolvers of Mark Manning were unloaded, and those of Lone Face were in his belt, and he had heard enough of the man who played his pistols as trumps in any game of life and death, to know that the slightest movement on his part would be his death-warrant.

It was a thrilling tableau certainly, the two men seated across the log, the cards between them, and their bodies bent to one side, and eyes turned up to the ranchero, and hands half raised, as though to ward off the deadly bullets, while, standing upon the rock, both hands thrust forward, and each holding a revolver upon the gamblers for the possession of a young girl, with Red Dove bound to a tree, and the indifferent horses in the back-ground, certainly made up a picture of striking interest and action.

For a moment only the tableau lasted, yet it seemed an age to Lone Face and Mark Manning, and then came, in clear, cutting words:

"Which one shall I kill first, Red Dove?"

"Let the Dead Shot make that man prisoner first and then the Red Dove will tell him all," she answered, motioning her hand toward Lone Face.

"And the other?"

"His claws are clipped, for the Lone Face had him in his power."

"Ah! you then are the Lone Pale face, the Hermit of the Mountains?" said Wild Bill.

"So men call me."

"And you are Wild Bill?" was the cold, almost indifferent reply of Handsome Hugh, who had regained his nerve.

"So men call me," answered Wild Bill, repeating the other's words.

"And you are Mr. Mark Manning, a lawyer from St. Louis, I believe?" and he turned his gaze upon the lawyer.

"Yes, my name is Manning."

"Well, I will deal with your case after awhile."

"Now, Lone Face, you are my prisoner, and if you have any desire to live, make no foolish effort to escape."

Springing down from the rock, Wild Bill quickly disarmed the Lone Face, and with some stout thongs he took from his hunting-shirt pocket, securely bound his hands behind his back.

Leaving him standing by the rock Wild Bill walked toward the tree to which Red Dove was bound, and had nearly completed the task of releasing her, when a cry from Mark Manning attracted his attention.

One glance was sufficient to show him that Lone Face was gone.

With the bounds of a tiger Wild Bill reached the spot and sprung upon the tree, and then the rock.

But nowhere was the prisoner he had so securely bound to be seen.

"I was watching you, sir, and forgot him for the moment, and when I looked again he was gone," explained Mark Manning.

Wild Bill then dashed to the top of the ridge, and gazed all around him; but the shadows of night were darkening the forest, and nowhere could he see the fugitive.

He listened attentively; but there came to his ears no sound of running feet.

"Let him go, for we shall meet again," he said quietly, returning to the spot where he had left Red Dove and the lawyer.

The Indian girl had in the mean time been freed by Mark Manning, and the two were standing together talking when the ranchero returned.

"The pale-face stranger has released me," said the maiden.

"Yes; but what right had he to make you a prisoner?" was the stern question of the ranchero.

"It does seem a strange way, sir, to give to an heiress the possession of a fortune left her; but I came here to find her, and employed as my guide an old hunter by the name of Old Buckskin, who led me to the mountains, where I could have an interview with Red Dove."

"He left me at a cabin, and several days after the man who has just escaped you came and said that Buckskin had sent him with the girl, for she accompanied him."

"The Red Dove suspected treachery, and

tried to escape, and the man called Lone Face bound her securely."

"Upon arriving here I found that he was as treacherous as a snake, and as he had both the Red Dove and myself in his power, I yielded to his demand to play a game to see who should have her."

"That game he won, and—"

"Pardon me, I played my Pistols as Trumps and won the game."

"True, and I am glad that you did."

"You have heard my story, sir, and when I show you the proofs of the fortune left the Red Dove, I feel that, as her friend, you will urge that she go with me to St. Louis and take possession of it."

"I thank you, sir, for your explanation, which seems a manly one, and if the Red Dove says you have not been unkind to her, I will consider you as her friend."

He looked toward the Indian girl as he spoke, and she answered:

"The stranger has treated the Red Dove kindly, though he wished to take her from her people."

"It was the Lone Face that was the cruel snake."

"Enough! Mr. Manning, I frankly tell you, sir, that I saw your name on the register of the hotel in Poker City, and remembering it as the same that was attached to a letter to the Indian Agent some months ago, making inquiry about Red Dove, and finding you had come to the mountains under the guidance of Old Buckskin, a mysterious old hunter, I at once took your trail and followed you."

"I trailed you to the cabin, and from thence here, and I heard, for I stood behind that rock, much that passed between you."

"The Red Dove saved my life once, and as her friend I would not allow harm to befall her."

"But go with us to the village of her father, Black Bear, and show us all your proofs of her good fortune, and I assure you I will urge that she return with you to St. Louis and get her inheritance."

"But I here swear to you, that if harm befalls her there I will trail you to the ends of the earth but what I avenge her."

There was no doubting but that Wild Bill meant just what he said; but Mark Manning met his gaze unflinchingly, and promised him that all should come around right in the end.

Then the three camped for the night, intending the next morning to start for the village of Black Bear.

CHAPTER XX.

AN EAVESDROPPER.

WHEN Handsome Hugh found himself in the power of Wild Bill, and remembered his conduct toward Red Dove, he knew that his life was in deadly danger.

If there was a man on earth that he stood in awe of, it was the one whose Pistols were always Trumps in the life-and-death-games he played.

He saw that Wild Bill was bending over the bonds that secured the Indian girl, unfastening the knots with his teeth, and that Mark Manning was gazing at him with a certain feeling of admiration and awe, in beholding the man whose life had been one of such romance and danger.

Lone Face knew the locality where he was, for he had often encamped in that very place before, and suddenly he started, and his face flushed with hope, as an idea flashed through his mind to escape.

As light as the tread of a panther he glided away, and disappeared behind a large rock that rose like a crag to the height of twenty feet.

The sides were steep, and, with his hands bound behind him, he found desperate hard work to scale it.

But he clambered up, using his chin even to aid him in holding on, until he could get a better knee or foot-hold.

It seemed ages almost to him, and yet he reached the top within half a minute's time, and shrunk down in a fissure, just large enough to hide his body.

He knew the place, for he had once chased a bear up there and killed it.

Hardly had he dropped down in the fissure, when his escape was discovered, and he crouched close, as Wild Bill sprung upon the lesser rock; but he did not care, for he felt that he was safe.

As night fell, he had hoped to escape, and

reaching a friendly Indian camp, he would soon return and have things his own way.

But this intention was thwarted by Wild Bill, who made a wicky-up for Red Dove on one side of the rock, and spread a blanket for himself and the lawyer upon the other.

To attempt to escape them, with such good ears and eyes as Wild Bill's and Red Dove's within ten feet of him, he knew was impossible.

After the Indian girl had sought rest, Wild Bill and Mark Manning sat down for a talk together, and every word the latter uttered, in telling the story of Captain Loring's death, and the contents of the will, was heard by the eavesdropper.

Then he heard Wild Bill's plan to make it known to Black Bear, and that he would urge the chief to let Red Dove go to St. Louis, and her half-brother Iron Eyes accompany her.

"We will lose no more time at the village, than to convince Black Bear that it is best for the Dove to go," he heard the ranchero say.

"For I must get back to Poker City as soon as possible, to act as guide for a young lady, who has come West to look up a man who she thinks murdered her father, who was his minor pard."

"Has she got good proof?" asked Mark Manning.

"Mrs. Insley, that is the mother of the young lady, had a dream, it seems, in which she saw this man murdering her husband, and putting this and that together, Miss Insley thinks that the dream can be proven to have been true."

"You know the man, then?"

"I have seen him, and often heard of him. His name is Prince Hal, out here on the border, and he is a daring and dangerous man."

"I hope the lady will succeed in finding him, and under your guidance I feel that she will," said Mark Manning.

Other conversation passed between the two, but the foregoing is what seemed to hold a charm for Lone Face, for he breathed hard and quick, as though deeply moved.

With the early dawn, greatly to the relief of Lone Face, the party left the camp, Wild Bill leading his horse and carrying his arms.

At this the man smiled grimly, for if he was dismounted, weaponless and bound, he had still his life, and that to him was everything.

To free himself wholly of his bonds was the first thing, and this he began work on.

During the night he had rubbed the raw-hide and buckskin thongs against the rock, as well as he could in his cramped position, and though he scratched the skin off of his hands, he also wore the tightly-tied knots at his wrists nearly in two.

At last these yielded, and he was free.

He could hardly suppress a cry of delight, but he did so, and after partaking of the remnants of the meal left by the others, he started at a swinging trot through the forest, evidently having in view a certain point of destination, and having determined a plan of action.

"No, Wild Bill, you'll find I am not dead yet, and woe be unto you if you cross my path, and I will see that you do," he muttered as he ran along.

CHAPTER XXI.

GOVERNOR DAVE GETS A "SURPRISE."

THE week of absence which Wild Bill had allowed himself upon leaving Poker City to follow the trail of Mark Manning, had passed, and the fair dweller in the Ranchero Exchange was growing anxious about him.

The mystery of such a person as herself coming to Poker City, Edna Insley had not explained to even the more than attentive landlord, and held no conversation with any one other than the chambermaid and her host, and with the latter she exchanged very few words, for she could not but notice that he was anxious to be agreeable.

Since her coming the "Governor" had "spruced up" considerably, put on a "boiled shirt," tied his cravat (which before was never done) and dressed in his best clothes every day, even going so far as to black the front of his boots, never expecting that Edna would discover the unpolished heels, as he always backed out of her presence.

He had entertained her one evening with stories of the wild orgies held in Poker City, until she could not go to sleep for hours, and when she did, had the nightmare, and she was determined he should never again get an opportunity to frighten her, though he had ne-

such intention in his mind, but believed he was entertaining her.

Even Carrots primped up after the coming of Edna Insley, and all about the hotel wore a more subdued look.

A perfect horsewoman, Edna had taken an afternoon gallop each day, and at other times kept her rooms.

But the days dragged slowly away to her, as she feared that something might occur to cause Wild Bill to disappoint her, and she became more impatient as the time went by.

The two giant sports, as they called themselves, had been terrorizing the town most shamefully, and it was only when she was told by the obsequious landlord that they were taking their afternoon siesta, that she trusted herself out on horseback.

She had seen, from her windows, scores of men fly before the two desperadoes, and had been told that one of them had already killed four men, and the other three, since their arrival in Poker City.

And more, the one who had not come up to the other, had said they must keep together in their count, and he was looking for the fourth victim.

Several men had had the pluck to draw on one of them, but he had promptly died at the hands of the other, and the few shots that had been fired by the Poker City terrors, had failed to kill the giants, and in only one case wounded them, which they seemed to care little for.

They had the best seats at the Ranchero's Exchange table, got the best food, were waited on at the bar first by Carrots, no matter who was present, and won large sums of gold nightly by cheating, at the Palace of Fine Arts, from those whom they asked to play with them, and who dared not refuse.

They were running a muck with a rein more free, than perhaps they would otherwise have done, from the fact that they had given out they would drive Wild Bill out of Poker City, and he had departed that very night, without even waiting to be driven.

They gloated over this, and the citizens of Poker City were dumfounded at the unaccountable conduct of their hero.

That he was gone, was certain, and even after scores had told him of the threats of Blonde and Brunette Bill, the Giant Sports.

Seated at the window of her room one afternoon, after having just returned from her ride, Edna Insley saw a horseman coming up the valley.

At first she feared it was Wild Bill, as much as she had hoped for his coming; but then the giants were seated on the piazza below, and she could hear their boarse voices and rude laughter, and that was why she dreaded that the coming horseman might be the ranchero.

Where others were in doubt of Wild Bill, on account of his sudden departure, Edna Insley knew that he had not left from fear of the giants, and felt that if he was returning, that a tragedy must be enacted within a few minutes.

Taking an open glass from her bureau, she leveled it at the horseman.

"Thank heaven it is not Mr. Hikok."

"No, it is an old man, and he has quickened the pace of his horse," she said.

She then closed the glass, and still watched the horseman, who rode up to the hotel stables and disappeared from sight.

That his coming interested her she had no idea, until a knock came at the door, and the landlord entered.

"Miss Insley, there is an old mountaineer here who says he would like to see you."

"To see me?" she asked in surprise.

"Yes, miss."

"Who is he?"

—"We call him Old Buckskin, and he is a scout, trapper and hunter."

"Very well, I will see him, sir," said Edna, and soon after the Governor ushered into the room Old Buckskin.

Off came his hat, and bowing low he said:

"Yer sarvint, m'am; I're as tickled ter see yer as tho' I'd run a nail in my foot."

Edna smiled and motioned to him to be seated, while the Governor seemed about to accept the invitation too, but was squelched by Old Buckskin, who said:

"Say, pard, if you hes bizziness with the leddy, I'll call ag'in."

"Oh, no; I merely wished to see if Miss Insley needed my services," said the nonplussed Dave.

"No, thank you," was Edna's dry reply, with a smile.

The Governor at once bowed and backed himself out, and they heard his retreating footsteps down the hall.

"Well, sir, may I ask why you called upon me?" said Edna, quietly, looking at the quaint old man with considerable interest.

"Yas, miss, that is what I hes come ter tell yer.

"Yer see I are a guide, scout an' sich, an' I tuk a gent'man, a lawyer from St. Louis, on a leetle trip some week ago, an' hevin' done with him, he hevin' tuk ther Overland stage back hum, I war a-goin' ter set my traps, when—

"Sh—"

The old hunter stopped talking, motioned to Edna to keep quiet, and drawing a revolver from his belt, whispered:

"Don't git skeert, but jist watch me skeer him up."

With the word he leveled the weapon at the door and fired.

There was a startled yell outside, a rushing of feet, and springing to the door Old Buckskin threw it open just in time to see the tails of the Governor's best coat and unblacked boot-heels going round the corner of the hall.

In spite of her sudden alarm at the act of Old Buckskin, Edna Insley broke into a ringing fit of laughter at the flight of the Governor, whose ear had been at the keyhole, and above whose head the bullet had passed in most dangerous proximity.

The next instant Governor Dave, white and red by turns, Carrots and several others came crowding up the steps.

"What was that shot?" cried the Governor, breathlessly.

"Nuthin' more'n one o' my weepins goin' off durned suddint by accident, an' skeerin' ther young leddy, Gov'ner."

"I'll putty up ther bullet-hole an' pay fer damidges when I comes down."

"I hope you was not alarmed, Miss Insley," volunteered Governor Dave.

"I should have been more alarmed, sir, had you been hurt," said the maiden, with her sweetest smile.

Dave saw he was suspected, and with a bow backed off again, this time not near so curious as he was before.

"Waal, ef he didn't skip lively, I are a weepin' liar, miss; but it were fun ter see him run, an' I guesses he hevn't got ther cur'osity he did hev."

Edna again laughed at the comical affair, and Old Buckskin went on with his explanation of why he had called upon her.

CHAPTER XXII.

OLD BUCKSKIN'S MISSION.

"As I were tellin' yer, leddy, when ther Gov'ner hed his ear at ther key-hole, an' I catch sight o' his whiskers, thet come through, I went ter set my traps on ther mount'in streams, arter seein' ther ly'er off, when I met ther gent as is know'd in these heur parts as Wild Bill, Pistol Trumps, Dead Shot, an' sich other pleasant names."

"You have seen Mr. Hikok, then?" eagerly asked the maiden.

"Mister who, leddy?"

"Wild Bill, as he is called here?"

"Yas, I hes seen him."

"Where is he now?"

"In ther mountains."

"When did you see him?"

"Three days ago."

"Did he send me any message?"

"Thet are what I are gettin' at, leddy."

"I beg pardon."

"It are granted, but fer what, durned ef I knows."

"Waal, I seen ther scout, as I were a-sayin', an' he says, says he:

"Old Buckskin, how is yer?"

"I told him I were purty peert, consid'rin', and says he:

"Don't yer want ter do suthin' fer me?"

"Says I:

"I does."

"Says he:

"Waal, I promised ther purtiest leetle leddy in these heur parts—them was his words, leddy—ter guide her up in ther mount'ins, on ther trail of a man she wanted to sar-cumvint.

"But I are engaged, at present, in a leetle matter as may detain me some time," says he.

"So," says he, "ef yer'd be so good as ter

act as guide fer her, I'll feller on yer trail as soon as I gets rid o' this present biz."

"Waal, leddy, I told him I were ther man, an' axed him what were ter be did?

"Does yer know Prince Harry?" he axed me.

"I said as how I know'd him most durned well."

"Then it are ter take ther leddy ter ther man," were his remarks.

"Then he added:

"But when yer see ther leddy she will tell yer jist what is ter be did, an' mind yer, ef she gits hurted, I'll jist hold you responsible."

"Now, leddy, heur I are, an' I kin guide yer clean ter kingdom come, ef yer'd like to go ther far."

"No, thank you, Mr. Buckskin, I only desire to find the man who is known as Prince Harry," said Edna in a disappointed tone, for she had desired Wild Bill for her guide and not Old Buckskin.

"I knows whar he kin be found, an' I'll take yer thar."

"Mr. Hikok certainly felt you could be trusted, or he would not have sent you," said Edna.

"Sartin! I kin be trusted, I'll sw'ar, fer I is acquainted with myself, leddy."

"When does yer think yer'd like ter go?"

"I have half a mind to wait until Mr. Hikok returns, so he can go with us."

"It might be well, leddy, but it are my opini'n thet snow are goin' ter fall soon this heur season, an' my old bones tell me it are in ther air, so as yer hes no time ter lose, ef yer are in a hurry."

"It would be impossible to go after the winter set in, I suppose?"

"Fer your tender body, leddy, it w'ud'n't be healthy, tho' fer the likes o' my old carkiss it w'ud'n't hurt much, an' ef I did git freezed thar w'ud be nobody ter mourn fer me, an' durned ef I believe a wolf w'ud find me wuth howlin' over."

The maiden seemed touched by the sad manner of the old man, for her position too was a lonely one, and a fellow feeling excited her sympathy for him.

But not wishing to get an attack of "the blues," she banished brooding thoughts from her mind, and said:

"Then you think it is best to start soon?"

"I does."

"When?"

"I is ready when you is, leddy."

"Then I shall purchase the horse I have been riding from the landlord, and leave necessary preparations in your hands."

"Here is some gold for you to buy an outfit for us."

"Yer is all bizziness, leddy, an' I loves ter serve them kind."

"Now I'll be off, an' like as not we'd better light off ter-night."

"Why not wait until morning?"

"Waal, it are safer ter go ter-night."

"You anticipate danger?"

"Folkses is durned cur'ous in these parts."

"And might ask where we were going?"

"No, they doesn't ask, they follers an' finds out."

"Then we will go to-night, for I will be ready."

"I w'll send up fer yer about gamblin' time, an' keep dark even ter ther landlud, fer he are ther most curiosome of 'em all, as yer hes seen, fer he might put a man on our trail right off suddint, ef he hed time ter send him."

"I will be guided by you in the matter."

"Yer is right, fer I knows. Now, git yer traps tergether, an' ef yer hes any valuables don't yer leave 'em heur, but take 'em with yer."

"When yer comes back yer'll want 'em, an' they mout not be heur; an' ef yer don't come back then it don't make no diff'rence."

"Wear yer warm clothin', leddy, an' take yer wrappin's, fer ther nights is durned cold."

"I'll be heur all right, don't you fear, an' at ther last minute you kin buy ther horse from ther Guv'ner."

With this Old Buckskin left the room, and Edna Insley at once began her preparations for her dangerous trip into the mountain fastnesses, to solve the mystery of her father's death, and to avenge him if she found that the man who had pretended friendship had been treacherous.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEPARTURE.

WHEN the chambermaid of the Exchange

called at the Palace of Fine Arts, where Governor Dave was spending the evening, and informed him that "the pretty lady in the Parlor Rooms wanted to see him immediate," the landlord hastily departed for his hotel.

It was after midnight, and, to his surprise he found Edna Insley all robed in her riding-habit, and with a sachet and roll of wraps in her hand.

"Why Miss Insley!" he exclaimed in wonder.

"Governor Dave, I am sorry to have troubled you, but I have received news that calls me away at once, and I wish to pay my bill, and also make a purchase of you."

"Why Miss Insley!" again gasped Dave.

"I would like you to keep my trunk, and reserve my rooms for me, for I shall not be gone very long, I think."

"But no stage goes until noon to-morrow."

"I am not going by stage, Governor."

"There is no other way that I can think of."

"I am going on horseback, and I wish to purchase from you the bay horse I have been riding since my sojourn here."

"Wonder is an expensive horse, Miss Insley."

"I asked you his price, sir?"

"It is very steep."

"Name it, and I will pay you."

Dave was silent a moment, and then it flashed through his mind to make a ten strike just here.

So he said:

"Miss Insley, the eyes of the city are on that horse, for he has not his superior in these parts, and I may say not his equal in speed and bottom, unless I except Wild Bill's horse, Midnight, which is a good animal."

"I let you have that horse to ride, because I saw you was a good rider, and I liked you, and now you ask me his price."

"It is that you accept him as a present from me."

"No, no, Governor Dave, I would not for a moment think of such a thing, for I am but a stranger to you, as you are to me."

"Wonder is your horse, Miss Insley, I insist upon it."

"And I decline to accept him, so shall have to look elsewhere for an animal, and it puts me to considerable inconvenience at this late hour."

The Governor was nonplussed; but feeling piqued at her refusal, he was determined upon a slight revenge, and said coldly:

"I would not inconvenience you, Miss Insley, for the world, so will sell you Wonder, if you will give the price I ask."

"Name it."

"One thousand dollars."

"Here is the money, sir, and now for the saddle and bridle?"

"A hundred more."

"Here, please, see if that is right, and give me a bill of sale for the animal, and also my board-bill."

"Deuce take her! she's all business," muttered Dave; but he said politely:

"Excuse me while I sign my check."

Once out of the parlor and he called to a man in the office.

"Tim, here is a dollar for you, so go and tell Trailer Tom to come here at once, mounted for a trip."

The man disappeared, and the Governor returned to the parlor, and armed with pen, ink and paper made out the bill for Wonder, and the board-bill, to which, spitefully he had tacked a dollar a day more than it amounted to.

Without a word Edna Insley paid it, and then said:

"Please order my horse saddled and brought to the side door, Governor Dave."

He obeyed her, and when the arrival was ready he escorted her out, and found there Old Buckskin mounted and awaiting her.

"Oh, you are the guide for Miss Insley?" he said.

"I are ther photograph of one, pard Guv'ner," was the calm reply.

Refusing his aid Edna sprung lightly into the saddle, hung her sachet on one horn, and the landlord having already strapped the roll of wraps on, she said coldly:

"Remember to keep my rooms, if you please."

"I'll do it, never fear; but I hope you are not going far, as there's snow in the air."

"Whatever distance I go, sir, I think Mr.

Buckskin will be able to take care of me; good night."

"He! he! he! Guv'ner yer got it thet time fer sartin."

"Good-evenin'," and Old Buckskin followed on after Edna, just as a horseman dashed up to the door.

The old hunter looked back, saw the horseman halt near Dave, and the two enter into conversation together, and he muttered:

"They is a-hatchin' out deviltry, leddy; but I guesses we kin sarcumvint 'em."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FATAL TRAIL.

THE horseman who dashed up to the door, as Edna and Old Buckskin rode away, was a man well known in Poker City as the best Indian trailer in that part of the country, up to the coming of Wild Bill.

He certainly had a talent for following "blind trails," where other men would give them up, and had won the sobriquet of Trailer Tom.

His dress was half miner, half Indian, for he wore leggings and moccasins, and a woolen shirt and sombrero.

He was armed with three revolvers, a knife and a rifle, and his horse, by no means a handsome animal, was certainly a good one.

"Well, Guv'ner, what are ther racket, fer Tim told me ter come a-humpin' it, as tho' ther devil were on my trail?" he said as he drew rein by the hotel door.

"I want you for a little trip, Trailer Tom, and will pay well for it."

"Count on me every time, Guv'ner; what to be did?"

"Come in and have suthin'."

"I'll do it, fer ther night are a leetle cold, an' crookin' my elbow won't go ag'in' me."

The three entered the bar together, and as the light fell upon the face of Trailer Tom, it showed a countenance that was bold, yet cruel and reckless.

"What'l it be, Tom?"

"I drinks brandy straight when I is treated, and whisky when I hes ter pay fer it."

"This time it are brandy, Carrots, an' don't yer give me ther tanglefoot bottle, fer I'm drinkin' with ther Guv'ner."

Carrots put up a bottle that was satisfactory, and the two drank, and then walked together into the private office.

"Did you see two people ride away just before you come, Tom?"

"Yas."

"Who were they?"

"Thet feller as I hed a row with onst, Old Buck, an' t'other were a petticoat."

"Right."

"Allus are, Guv'ner."

"Did you see which trail they took?"

"Yes."

"You didn't look back."

"I sees without looking back, Guv'ner."

"Well, which trail was it?"

"The ledge road."

"I thought so, from the way they were going."

"Now I want you to follow them."

"I'll do it."

"Bring me a straight story of what that girl is about up here in the mountains, and you can have the amount of her board-bill for the ten days she was here."

"Yes."

"How much?"

"She paid me ten dollars a day, for she had the parlor rooms."

"I wish she'd a' hed ther whole house; but I'll do ther work fer yer, Guv'ner."

"Then you must start at once."

"Soon as I gets an X fer current expenses, which don't count, yer know, Guv'ner, an' a leetle more o' ther brandy ter keep ther heart in me."

"You had one drink, Tom, and—"

"Thet were ter keep ther cold out."

"Don't fear me, as yer know I are a perfect sarmon on temp'rance when I are on ther trail."

"The X, Guv'ner, an' one more treat."

"Come on then, and here is the money."

Trailer Tom took the ten dollars, carefully examined the bills to see there was no mistake, and after another glass of brandy, mounted his horse and rode away in the moonlight, for the moon had risen above the distant mountains and the valley seemed burnished with silver and the little river a ribbon of gold beneath its rays.

Back to the "Palace" then went Governor Dave, to indulge in another game of cards, and he was winning heavily, when suddenly into the saloon dashed Carrots, and bending over whispered in his ear.

Dave's face turned pale, and pocketing his winnings, he hastily departed from the saloon.

At the door of the hotel stood the raw-boned horse of Trailer Tom, and in the bar, on the floor, and his head supported by an upturned chair, lay the scout himself, holding his hand hard on his side, from which welled a stream of blood.

"Well, my poor Tom, what is it?" asked Dave bending over him.

"It were did awhile ago," said the man faintly.

"Did you shoot yourself by accident?"

"Nary accident, Guv'ner, an' ther Doc heur says I bes been on my last trail."

"Yes, you will not live half an hour, Tom, for internal hemorrhage is going on," said the physician, a retired army surgeon who had settled in Poker City, and who happened to pass the hotel as Trailer Tom rode up and fell from his horse.

"But who shot you, Tom?" again asked the Governor.

"She did."

"She! who?"

"Ther petticoat I were a-trailin' fer yer."

"What! Miss Insley?"

"I guess so; it were ther gal with Old Buckskin."

"No."

"Pard Dave, I hain't goin' ter lie ter yer, jist as I are about ter go on ther long trail to ther spirit land."

"Forgive me, Tom, for I meant not to doubt you; but how did it happen?"

He turned to speak, but had not the power of utterance, and after a few convulsive shudders, Trailer Tom had started on the trail leading to the Great Beyond.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RETURN.

STRAIGHT to the village of Black Bear, Wild Bill went with Red Dove and Mark Manning, and the story of the maiden's capture and rescue was made known, though the lawyer was shielded in the matter, as the ranchero had become convinced that he was acting really for the good of the Indian girl.

He had impressed this also upon Red Dove, so that Mark Manning received a warm welcome from Black Bear.

The inheritance was talked over, and both Wild Bill and Mark Manning convinced the chief that it was best for Red Dove to go to St. Louis and get possession of her fortune, which, if she so willed, she could spend in the improvement of her people and their comfort.

After awhile, and much urging, Black Bear gave his consent, if Iron Eyes went with her, and this was willingly acquiesced in by the lawyer.

Iron Eyes however had not returned from his hunt, and they were compelled to await his arrival.

At last he came, and old Black Bear himself, with a large force of warriors, escorted the party to the nearest point of the Overland road where they could catch a stage, and the passengers bound East were somewhat alarmed at having the coach halted, and beholding around it a large force of Indian warriors.

They gave sighs of relief however when they found their scalps were safe, yet cast sly glances at their new fellow passengers, who consisted of Mark Manning, Red Dove and Iron Eyes.

When the stage had rolled on out of sight, Wild Bill bade farewell to Black Bear and his braves, and hastily wended his way back to Poker City.

It was growing late in the afternoon when he arrived, and the loafers had begun to assemble at the hotel, and on the piazza, their favorite resort.

He was spied a long way off, and soon recognized, and the citizens of Poker City drew long breaths, for they saw that Wild Bill was returning, and alone, and therefore could not have been so terribly frightened by the Giant Spots.

That very morning the second of the pair had brought himself up even with the other's death-score, and four apiece within two

weeks, was what they summed up, and they were therefore in a good-humor.

"We hev got this heur town by ther tail, Blondy, fer ther' hain't a man, woman, or child, dare open thar heads ag'in' us," said Brunette Bill to Blonde Bill, as the two sat together upon the piazza that afternoon, and their remarks were heard by scores of men, who were in reality afraid of them.

"Thet are so, Brunette Billy Boy, an' we'll hev ter emigrats an' look up another sojourning' spot, whar ther fellers hes got more sand."

"Yas, an' we'll go down through ther locality whar they say that Pistol Trumps feller comes from, which we skeert out o' town, fer they do say as thar is men down thar in that part o' Kansas, thet kin out-jump, out-run, out-ras'le, out-shoot an' out-anything any other feller a-livin', an' thar is whar we live, Blondy Boy."

"I did hope ter be entertained heur in Poker City, an' were sartin of it, when Wild Bill sailed ter ther front; but he tuk cover durned quick, an' a clipped nose are all he has left ter remain us of him."

"What are thet yer say, Guv'nor o' this Hash Factory?" and the giant turned to the landlord, who had been glancing down the valley.

"I said that Wild Bill was coming back."

"No."

"There he comes."

"Then we is likely ter be around," said Brunette Bill.

"Nary; he thinks we has gone, an' are comin' sneakin' inter town," added Blonde Bill with a sneer.

"Waal, whatever his game, we wins," said Brunette.

"He holds a full hand of trumps, pards," said Governor Dave, gaining courage, as Wild Bill drew nearer.

"Yas, Pistils is Trumps with that High-flyer," cried one of the crowd.

"Shet up, or I'll tarn yer toes up ter ther daises," cried one of the Giants, in answer to the last remark, and the one who had made the reckless remark, quickly disappeared in the crowd.

In the mean time Wild Bill had reached Sloan's store, and all along the street, as he advanced, people were welcoming him with shouts and waving of hats.

"They is shoutin' fer his fun'r'al," growled Brunette Bill.

"Waal, we'll atten', seein' as we pervides ther corpse," was Blonde Bill's reply.

Mounted upon his splendid jet-black horse Midnight, Wild Bill came on at a swinging walk toward the hotel.

He had been by his ranch and was dressed with far more care than usual, and looked the ideal border cavalier that he was.

He raised his sombrero in answer to the words of welcome, as he rode along, and hardly glanced at the crowd gathered at the hotel.

Many voices had called to him that the Giants were still in town; but it had no apparent effect upon him, and the falling in, at a respectable distance behind him, out of pistol range, was a sure evidence that a deadly fracas was expected at the Ranchero's Exchange, immediately upon his arrival.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BATTLE OF THE GIANTS.

"SPORTS, yer may hev druv Wild Bill out o' Poker City some days ago, but he hev got over his skeer an' are comin' straight back ag'in, so look out thet he don't trump ther keerds yer holds," cried a miner from around the corner of the hotel, and he dodged back just in time to escape a shot from the Sports, for both had drawn their revolvers.

And straight for the hotel Wild Bill certainly was coming, and his face was as serene as a May morn, and he sat in his saddle with an air of utter indifference to the style of welcome he would receive.

The shouts of those who had recognized him had ceased, and only the low hum of voices broke the silence.

Those on the hotel piazza had scattered to either side, leaving the two Giants alone.

The people on either side of the street already began to move out of direct range, so that it was evident a clear field was to be left for the combatants.

There were men in the crowd who had avoided the Giant Sports, but now were determined, whatever might be Wild Bill's fate, if

the trouble once began, the two desperadoes should die then and there.

The huge pards had risen, as they were left alone, and each had taken the shelter of one of the stout piazza pillars, which were trees sawed off smoothly at either end, and some foot in diameter, a very fair protection for a man to dodge behind.

That Wild Bill was blind to all these movements, and that the Giant Sports were prepared for him, was not to be thought of, for his eyes were too near akin to the eagle's, not to have recognized the immense forms half-hidden by the piazza posts.

He had come into town without a thought of the Giants; but warned by the crowd of their presence, he remembered their threats, and was also made aware that his departure from Poker City so suddenly had been construed into flight from them.

This angered him, and though he sought not difficulty with them, he was not the man to avoid one.

The Ranchero's Exchange was his destination, and thither he was going, and not an inch would he swerve from his purpose.

Suddenly, when within thirty paces of the piazza, he saw the Sports drop their hands to their hips.

The first man he had met in the edge of town as he came in had told him how the Giants had been disporting themselves, that Poker City was terrorized by them, and that they were dead shots at any range, and had already killed four men apiece.

As Wild Bill saw their hands drop upon their hips he seemed suddenly to decide upon some course of action, for, to the horror of everybody, he wheeled to the rightabout and cantered down the street.

This act brought derisive laughter and yells from the Sports, and a groan from every admirer of the hero, for it looked like a clear back-down.

But he did not ride far, halting by the side of a horse that was hitched in front of Sloan's store.

It was a clay-bank mustang, and an animal he knew well, for he had sold him to the store-keeper but a couple of weeks before.

"Sloan, lend me your horse, and if he is hurt I'll pay you double his price," said Wild Bill.

"All right, Hikok, take him."

"If I am killed, you can have Midnight."

So saying Wild Bill quickly transferred his saddle to the back of the claybank mustang, and springing upon him, again rode up the street toward the hotel.

The crowd, that had begun to gather, at his seeming flight, once more around the hotel, now scattered again.

In a walk the mustang advanced, and Wild Bill sat in the saddle with the same indifferent air he had before shown.

What his change of horses meant none could understand, and the Giant Sports seemed more puzzled at his strange conduct than any one else.

The upper windows of the hotel, and of the adjacent buildings were now crowded with faces, and a deathlike silence reigned upon all.

Reaching the spot where he had before turned to the rightabout, Wild Bill called out, as he drew his horse to a halt:

"Is it war, pards, or peace?"

"It are war to ther death, an' thar goes my card; so trump it ef yer kin," shouted Brunette Bill in his hoarse tones.

With the last word he threw his revolver forward and fired.

The bullet was well sent, for it turned the sombrero on Wild Bill's head half around, as it cut through the crown, and many believed it had struck him fair, as he suddenly slipped from the saddle.

But, as his feet touched the ground, he gave a ringing cry to his mustang, that bounded forward at a run.

And, sheltered by the horse, Wild Bill advanced upon his foes.

Rapidly the shots rung out from the two Giant Sports, and the mustang snorted with fright and pain, and bounded high in the air; but Wild Bill held him on his course and at a run, and the space was soon gone over.

Then the steps were reached, and with revolvers in each hand the Giant Sports fired, and with evident nervousness, for they could not bring down the mustang, and Wild Bill, if wounded did not show it.

Not yet had he fired, and, at a ringing cry

from his lips, the wounded and terrified mustang bounded up the dozen steps leading to the piazza.

Then, upon the very top step he reared and fell dead, and springing upon his body, Wild Bill shouted:

"Now, I play my trumps, pards."

In each hand he held a revolver, and each weapon seemed to flash together.

Then, down in their tracks sunk the Giant Sports, one stone-dead, Brunette Bill, and Blonde Bill, with his weapons falling from his hands, swaying wildly, and reaching out as though to grasp some object in the darkness.

Once the tigers were down the crowd rushed forward, and one man bounded to the side of the wounded and disarmed giant, who yet lived, and placed a pistol to his head.

But, ere he could draw trigger there was a report, and a bullet shattered his wrist, while Wild Bill shouted:

"I trump your game, you accursed coward, to shoot a man on his knees."

A yell of pain broke from the lips of the wounded miner, and the crowd fell back with a rush, while Wild Bill advanced upon Blonde Bill, as he crouched against the side of the house, bleeding from a wound along the side of his head, which seemed to have half-stunned and wholly dazed him, and said in a kindly tone:

"Come, pard, the fight's over, and your friend has turned his toes up to the daisies; but you are hurt, and I hold no ill-will toward a man who can't strike back."

Blonde Bill put his hands to his head, as though to recall his scattered senses, and, with the aid of Wild Bill staggered to his feet, and then turned his eyes full upon the man who had defeated him, and slain his comrade.

One look into his face was sufficient to show all that his mind was gone, for the bullet had maddened him.

"Look out all! he's mad!"

The cry came from Governor Dave, and helter-skelter went the crowd.

But Wild Bill stood firm, and his dark eyes fixed upon the madman caused him to shrink back from his gaze.

But only for one instant and then, with a wild shriek he bounded from the piazza and darted down the street, scattering the citizens of Poker City in terror from before him.

A few shots were fired at him, but none took effect, and coming suddenly upon a horseman turning a corner, he dragged him to the ground, sprung into his saddle and darted away like the wind toward the mountains.

"After him, Bill, for you are the only man that dare follow him, and your horse is the only one that can catch my mare," shouted the owner of the kidnapped animal, and who was the captain of Poker City Vigilantes.

"Then he must escape, for I am wounded and cannot follow him."

"Governor, give me a room and send for Doctor Medway," and Wild Bill walked into the hotel, with no sign of emotion upon his stern face, as a trace of what he had just passed through, or that he was suffering from three severe wounds received in his battle with the Giant Sports.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

THE surgeon, who had been at the side of Trailer Tom when he died, had been a witness of the Battle of the Giants, and he hastily came forward to offer his services to Wild Bill.

"It was the prettiest fight I ever saw, Bill, and you played your cards well, holding a hand full of trumps at the end of the game," said Doctor Medway, whose ruling passion was gambling, and who always interspersed his conversation with card-players' slang.

Wild Bill smiled grimly, as he stripped, for an examination of his wounds, and the doctor went on:

"That was a splendid deal of yours, making that mustang take the most of the shots, and you were wise to pass when you had your splendid horse Midnight with you."

"They don't deal out animals like that every day."

"Those Giant Sports held good hands, and played well, for the mustang was hit eleven times, but they were aiming at your legs under his body, and your head over his neck."

"You played but two trumps I believe?"

"Yes, I fired twice, doctor."

"And they took the deck."

"By Heaven! it was beautiful, and I congratulate you, for I certainly expected to see you pass in your chips, for the two were such devils I was sure they would eucher even you, Bill."

"Ah! now I can see how they played their cards."

"This is but a flesh wound in the shoulder, and amounts to nothing."

"This one in your side glanced on the rib, right over your heart, a close deal that—no, the bone is not hurt at all, and the mark of the bullet will soon heal up."

"See, it cut its way out through your clothing!"

"That one in your arm?" Well, that is another lucky escape."

"This one on my left leg, doctor?" asked Bill.

"Ah! that is a little dubious. I'll probe for it—why, there it is."

"Thank you, doctor, so I am not hurt," said Wild Bill, smiling.

"A man with four bullet wounds not hurt?

"Well, you are game, Hikok, and to a man who bears the scars you do, I suppose you are not much hurt with these little flesh wounds, which will heal in a few weeks."

"Few weeks, doctor?" Why I have some work to do at once, so please dress them for me and they'll not trouble me much."

The doctor did dress the wounds most skillfully, and Wild Bill, refusing to see the crowd that were anxious to grasp his hand, lay down to rest, after sending for the landlord.

"Dave, I wish you would go to Miss Insley's room and tell her I have returned, and will be at her service to-morrow morning."

"Miss Insley's room, Bill?"
"Yes."

"She is not there."
"Then I am glad if she was out riding and did not see that row."

"Tell me when she comes back, Dave."

"Durned if I know when she is coming back."

"What! has she gone?" asked Wild Bill, in surprise.

"Yes; she left several nights ago."
"And alone?"

"No, with Old Buckskin."
"What?"

"With that white-haired hunter from the mountains, we call Old Buckskin."

"She went alone with him?"
"Yes."

"And at night?"

"She did."

"This is strange."

"So I thought, but I had an idea you knew about it."

"I knew?"
"Yes; for Old Buckskin told Carrots that you had sent him with a message to Miss Insley."

"The infernal old liar! I did no such thing."

"Did he not leave here some time before as guide for a lawyer from St. Louis?"

"He did."

"Dave, there is some mystery about that white-haired hunter."

"He seems square, but it looks as though he might be crooked."

"Tell me about his coming, and the departure of Miss Insley with him."

The Governor told all he knew, excepting the eavesdropping occurrence, which he wisely kept back, and how the maiden had paid him a good price for his horse Wonder, and asked him to keep her trunk until her return.

"This is very strange, Dave."

"Yas; it does not look straight."

"But, Bill, you know Trailer Tom?"

"Yes."

"Well, he lost his life the same night."

"He was killed, poor fellow?"

"Yes, and we planted him over with Jake Goss, Dandy Roe and the other boys in the new graveyard, the old one being full."

"Who killed him?" asked Wild Bill indifferently.

"Now that is the rub."

"It seemis Trailer Tom saw Old Buckskin and Miss Insley going off that way in the night, and followed them."

"What happened, I don't know, but Tom came back here dying from a wound in his side, and says she shot him."

"She?"

"Yes, Miss Insley."

"Good God! Can this be possible?"

"Trailer Tom thought it was," was the dry remark of the Governor.

"There was cause for it then, and he was doubtless sneaking on their trail, and if so, it served him right."

"There is a mystery in this, Dave, and I shall ferret it out."

"Now I want rest, for I must be on the trail as soon as I can."

"Send for Midnight, please, and stable him, and tell Sloan I will call in and settle for his mustang."

The landlord departed, a trifle anxious for fear that it might be found out that he had set Trailer Tom on the trail, and Wild Bill was left alone to try and solve the riddle of Edna Insley's mysterious midnight departure, and the report that she had killed Trailer Tom.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A WOMAN'S SHOT.

I WILL now return to Old Buckskin and Edna Insley, the night of their departure from Poker City.

As for the maiden, she had idolized her father, and, as a little girl, had mourned for his misfortunes.

When, after arriving at maidendom the news of his death came to her, she was almost broken-hearted, and merely as the friend of her father, she had treated Henry Hammond well, for she had not liked him particularly.

When her mother's dream was told her, and that mother's death followed, with the scene with Henry Hammond, she had been the more convinced that there was something wrong.

She could not realize her father as dead somehow, and it was, impelled more to discover the truth, that she sought the Far West.

But there was in her heart a deep hatred for the man Hammond, and, if she could discover that he was guilty of having murdered her father, then she would be revengeful to the last degree.

Fearless from childhood, with resolution and nerve, and a haryd constitution, she was determined to carry out her plans to the end, cost what they might, and had no fear of the result.

She was thoroughly equipped for her journey, and set forth that night with hope in her heart that all would be well.

From her first meeting with Wild Bill she had been drawn toward him with feelings of admiration and gratitude, which were deepening into affection, and she did not doubt but that with his aid she could accomplish all that she came for.

"What are you eying the back trail so anxiously for, Mr. Buckskin?" asked Edna, as they crossed the river and headed for the mountains.

"I are not sartin but that ther are a gerloot a-watchin' us."

"What can be his motive?"

"Waal, cur'osity are a bad disease, leddy, an' tho' folkses do say as how ther wimmins hes got it all, I guesses Adam dropped in afore it were all gi'n out ter Eve, fer man critters do hev thar share, I'll sw'ar."

Edna's laugh echoed through the pass, and Old Buckskin said quickly:

"That thar are sweet music, but don't do it no more, fer ye'll make ther ripplin' waters, an' ther birds, an' ther wind sighin' in ther trees all jealous, acause they can't do nuthin' haff so sweet-toned: but then ag'in, I'd hate ter hear thet laff answer'd by a Injun warwhoop."

"I'll not be rash again, Mr. Buckskin; but hark! I did hear a hoof-fall behind us."

"Yer hes good ears, leddy, fer thar are a horse a-follerin' us, an' he are rid by a man."

After a ride of a mile further, the guide suddenly drew rein, and said:

"Miss, does yer see thet rock?"

"Yas."

"Waal, you ride ahind it an' wait thar, an' I'll ride on."

"Let ther feller pass, an' I'll soon see what he are up ter, fer I doesn't like my steps dogged."

"No, it is unpleasant."

"Now thar is the rock, an' you wait thar fer me."

Edna quietly turned her horse aside from the head trail, and soon was hidden behind the huge rock.

Presently the horseman came in sight, riding slowly, and as the moonlight fell upon him, the maiden recognized the man she had seen ride up and halt at the side of Governor Dave, as they left the hotel.

"That landlord has sent him on my trail," she muttered.

Just then, as he was passing, he suddenly halted.

Then he rode on and disappeared in the distance up the pass.

A moment after she heard a sudden plunge of a horse, and frightened snort, and a shot, followed by a cry as though a man had been hit hard.

The next instant there came the rapid clatter of hoofs down the pass.

It was the same that had gone up three minutes before.

"Halt!" cried Edna in ringing tones.

She saw the man start, drop his hand on his revolver and come on.

"Halt! or I fire!" she cried sternly, though she did not intend then to fire upon him.

"Curse you! take that!" was the savage answer, and, with the flash of his pistol a bullet cut through the crown of the maiden's hat.

A second shot followed, and she felt a tingling sensation in her arm.

Then Edna Insley's blood was up and she too fired.

She was in the shadow of the overhanging rock, and indistinctly seen; the man was in the bright moonlight, and a fair target.

She fired but once, and at her shot he reeled in his saddle, seemed about to fall; but recovering himself dashed on by, though clinging to his horse with both hands.

"Great God! it is ther girl that shot me."

Such were the words that escaped his lips as he dashed on, and like a statue, her smoking revolver in her hand, Edna Insley sat in her saddle gazing after him until he disappeared in the gloom, and the clatter of his horse's hoofs died away, leaving the silence around her unbroken.

CHAPTER XXIX.

OVER THE CLIFF.

NOT until Edna heard the approach of footsteps did she start from her reverie, so completely dazed was she by what she had done.

"He fired at me twice, and one bullet went through my hat, the other just grazed my shoulder, and he would have killed me had I not shot him."

"But he did not know he was firing upon a woman, from his words," she muttered in an absent way.

"Hal! some one is coming, and on foot."

"Can it be the guide?"

"Hallo, leddy, are that you!" cried Old Buckskin coming in sight.

"Yes, and I am glad to see that you are not dead," she said fervently.

"Oh no, I are like a cat, hard ter kill."

"But he fired on you?"

"He did fer a fact, an' I got it in ther arm, tho' it are no more'n a flea-bite."

"Ye see, I put my critter in ther pines, an' I laid ter catch ther gerloot with my lariat."

"I throw'd it prime, but it did not go over his head jist right an' he wheeled about, an' let me hev it."

"I called ter my critter, an' he thought I were callin' other pards an' jist got down ther pass."

"But what in thunder, leddy, were all that shootin' down heur?"

"I believed he had killed you and tried to stop him."

"He did not halt, believed I was a man, and fired on me twice, cutting through my hat with one bullet, and just clipping my shoulder with another."

"I then fired in self defense."

"Bully fer you."

"And I hit him."

"Bully fer you, leetle gal. Did he drop?"

"No, he reeled in his saddle, as though hard hit, dropped his revolver, and went out of sight down the pass holding on with both hands to the saddle."

"I hope he may tumble off an' break his durned neck, ef yer bullet didn't do fer him."

"I hope I have not hurt him seriously, for I would not like his life on my hands," said Edna sadly.

"It hain't nothin', when yer gits use ter it."

"At fust yer does see sperits at night, but arter awhile they lets yer rest."

"Yas, thar be his pistol, an' it are, as I thought, Trailer Tom, fer heur are his name."

"Now we'll ride on, leddy, an' I'll jist take a trail as is not gin'rally know'd ter Poker City gerloots, fer thet Trailer Tom evident thought thar were more of us, an' ef he hain't much hurted he'll be arter us."

"Ef he are got it hard, then he hes pards as will strike our trail."

"Then let us hasten on, and once we have found Mr. Hikok, I will have no fear," said Edna anxiously.

"Yas, Wild Bill are a horse ter let."

"Now I'll jist mount my critter, an' ef I hain't a liar, we is a-goin' ter hev a leetle goose-pickin' in ther air."

"What is that?" asked Edna.

"Goose-pickin' are ther English fer snow fallin', leddy, an' we wants ter find shelter afore it begins."

Old Buckskin then went after his horse, and mounting, the two rode on, the guide turning out of the regular trail at a point where a rivulet crossed it, and keeping in the water-bed for the distance of a mile, in spite of the rough riding over the slippery stones.

Then he reached a plateau, emerging out of the forest upon it, just as the snow began to descend in huge, feathery flakes, that, in spite of their beauty, in that desolate spot, and in the darkness of night, looked weird and forbidding, and sent a chill to the heart of Edna.

As they progressed the snow fell more heavily, and when at last the dawn broke the skies were seen to be overcast, the ground was white, and there was every evidence that the snow would continue.

"We'll have ter rest ther horses, leddy, in yonder canyon, an' you kin get a nice leetle nap."

"Then we'll press on ontill we reach ther camp where I are ter take yer," said Old Buckskin.

"I leave all to you, sir," answered the maiden, with perfect confidence in her guide.

In a secluded nook where the snow had not reached, Old Buckskin erected a blanket shelter for Edna, and spread her a soft couch.

Then he built a fire and soon had a delicious cup of coffee, broiled venison and biscuit for their breakfast, and both ate with a relish.

The horses were lariated out under the shelter of a cliff, where the grass was not covered with snow, and throwing several logs on the fire, Old Buckskin also sought rest.

It was late in the afternoon when the guide awoke, and he was evidently angry with himself for having overslept, for he muttered something about tons of snow having fallen, and darkness catching them before they reached the camp.

He hastily got dinner, and then woke Edna, who was wholly rested and in a most cheerful humor.

Eating a hearty meal, the two then mounted, both warmly muffled up, and the horses were turned on the trail they were to follow.

Once out of the sheltered canyon, and all was a sea of snow before them, and only the instinct of the old hunter could guide them then.

Edna realized this and said nothing to distract his attention.

His face was calm and his eyes most watchful, as though he fully appreciated the danger they were facing.

The storm was momentarily increasing in violence, and the snow was deepening and became tedious traveling for the horses.

Yet on they struggled, the guide unswervingly holding his way with a steadiness that gave Edna renewed confidence in him.

At last darkness began to settle upon the earth, but there was no thought of a halt for rest or food.

They must press on to the camp, for a few more hours would prevent travel altogether.

In advance went Old Buckskin, and close behind followed Wonder, showing more nerve and endurance than did the animal of the guide, hardy as he was.

Soon the darkness grew intense, and the snow blinded them, yet still on moved the guide.

"By Heaven! I've struck my own trail again."

The words came from Old Buckskin, and Edna heard them, and from the easy traveling of the horses it was evident that they had circled around and gotten into the track of snow they had before broken.

A moment the guide halted, and then branched off in the very teeth of the storm.

There was an ascent of a hill, and the fierce, cold wind struck them hard, and presently Old Buckskin halted suddenly and cried.

"To the right, for we are on the edge of a precipice."

The border dialect had been dropped in his sudden alarm, and he glanced quickly backward.

But no answer came.

"Girl!"

No response.

"Good God! she has gone over the cliff."

So it seemed, for nowhere was the horse and his fair rider visible, and dismounting, Old Buckskin found they had been traveling on the very edge of a cliff for a hundred yards.

Back on the same trail he went, and then halted suddenly.

"Yes she has gone."

A great bank of snow had broken from the path at his feet, and with it had gone Wonder and his mistress.

But how far down?

Into what kind of an abyss?

These questions the old hunter could not answer, and loudly he hailed:

"Ho! down below there?"

No answer came.

"Oho! Miss Insley!"

Still no answer, and shivering, wretched, with death staring him in the face, Old Buckskin remounted his horse, and rode slowly away from the fated spot.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MAD GIANT.

To say that the citizens of Poker City were slightly worked up by the escape of one of the Giant Sports, and in a condition there was no doubt was madness, would we to draw it mildly.

Those dwellers on the outskirts of the town were most desirous of keeping a look-out for the return of the mad giant, for they confidently expected his return.

All in the town attended the burial of the giant that was killed, and Wild Bill, with his usual generosity paid the funeral expenses, and had the money forced upon him, and which was considerable, given to store-keeper Sloan for distribution among any miners of the camp that might be sick and injured.

To the disappointment of many Wild Bill did not attend the burying, as the doctor said he must positively keep his room for a few days.

The snow-storm in the upper mountains, had only come upon the valley in drifts, and had soon been blown away, or melted by the sun.

But the white mountains, as seen from the Ranchero's Exchange, proved that the storm had been severe up there, and was deep enough to last, and this was a cause of anxiety to Wild Bill, regarding the fate of Edna Insley.

The mysterious disappearance of the maiden from the town, had also excited the curiosity of the people, and her name was on every tongue.

The return of Trailer Tom from a night scout, and wounded by a woman, also caused wonder, for no one could understand why he had been shot, and being dead he could not make the secret known, while Governor Dave was as silent as an oyster upon the subject.

With all this to talk about, gossip was circulating pretty freely in Poker City, during the ten days or two weeks that Wild Bill lay at the hotel, fretting that his wounds kept him from following the trail of Old Buckskin and Edna Insley.

That it would be impossible to trail them, after the severe snow-storm, Wild Bill well knew; but he had formed a plan to discover the retreat of the old hunter in the mountains and once he did that, all would be plain sailing for him.

One night, while the winds were whistling through the streets and came moaning, and in great gusts from the mountains, and their chill breath had caused all who loved comfort to hug closely the huge fire-places in their cabins, there was heard a series of wild, unearthly yells.

Then came the clatter of hoofs, and down the main street, and coming from the mountain, dashed a horseman.

The animal was at full speed, and his rider sat high in his saddle, a revolver in each hand, and from his lips issued yell after yell that were demoniacal in their wildness.

Closer to the firesides shrunk the timid, while bolder men sprung to the windows and doors, to see who it was, and what it meant.

At first it was believed to be a raid by the Indians; but no, only one horseman was visible, and he was a white man.

As he reached the sickly-looking lantern before the Ranchero's Exchange, he began to fire his revolvers, and sent a bullet into the bar-room, shivering the bottles, and in such close proximity to Carrots's red head, that he believed for an instant that he was hit, and put his hand to it in awe.

A piece of glass had slightly wounded him, and as he saw the blood on his hand he gave a cry of alarm.

"The red rubs off, Carrots; I never knew that before; but what in thunder is the row," cried Wild Bill, coming into the bar from his room.

He was without his coat and hat, but his belt of arms was around his waist, and he was evidently ready for work, if his services were needed.

"Ther Mad Giant are at it," yelled a man, rushing into the bar, half frightened out of his wits.

With a single bound Wild Bill was upon the piazza.

But the Mad Giant was on his way down the street, riding at full speed, yelling and shouting as he went.

A moment only he seemed to be in going through the town, and then all was silent again.

But in that short time, he had left death in his path, for several unfortunates had fallen beneath his aim.

"I guess I'm well enough to strike his trail in the morning.

"Carrots, have my horse ready fer me at dawn," said Wild Bill quietly, as he turned and left the bar, on his way to his room, to the great regret of the excited crowds who were gathering there to talk over the desperate ride of the Mad Giant.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WILD BILL AT HOME.

It had been Wild Bill's intention for several days, to start upon the search for Edna Insley, and he was glad of the midnight ride through Poker City, of the Giant Madman, as an excuse to leave town, for under a pretense of starting upon his trail he could switch round upon the track of Old Buckskin and the maiden.

The next morning at an early hour he had his breakfast, and mounting Midnight, felt wholly himself once more, for his wounds had about healed.

"It was too early for any of the idlers, even those in a hurry for their morning "bitters" to be about, although Carrots had faithfully circulated it, that Wild Bill was going on ther Mad Giant's trail at day-dawn.

Down the deserted street he rode in the keen morning air, smoking a cigar, and feeling ready for any encounter, while Midnight seemed anxious to fly, rather than canter over the frozen ground.

Arriving at the spot where the trails divided Wild Bill saw a light in a cabin near by, and hailed.

"Hullo! who are you?" came from within.

"Did a horseman pass here last night, yelling, and firing his revolvers?"

"Waal, thar were suthin' went by as tho' ther devil were arter it, an' we hes laid durned close ever since," was the answer.

"Which trail did it go?" asked Wild Bill.

"Ther one to ther right."

"Thank you," and he was riding on, when a voice called out.

"Hain't ther you, Wild Bill?"

"Yes."

"I thought it, fer yer hes a voice a man hears onst, he knows next time."

"What were ther thing as went by?"

"The Mad Giant."

"No."

"Fact! he has broken loose with a vengeance in the town."

"Any body hurted?"

"A few killed."

"No."

"Yes."

"An' you are arter him?"

"Yes."

"Better not go."

"I better go, so as to prevent, if I can another visit from him to your town."

"Thet's so, ye'd better go; but is yer well ag'in, Bill?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Don't thank me, fer its yer constitooshun ter thank, pard."

"We wishes yer luck, an' ef yer thinks that mad critter are comin' back, we won't detain yer."

With a light laugh Wild Bill rode on, and as it was now getting light, he dismounted and examined the trail for tracks.

Those of the madman's horse he soon found, and noting them carefully, remounted and went on his way at a swift canter.

The trail of the madman, which was very plain after leaving the vicinity of the town, led him toward his own ranch, and went on by it.

But, as it was noon, he determined to stop for dinner, and then go on, for the trail was circling around toward the larger range of mountains, where it was his intention to go in search of Edna Insley.

The snow still lay on the ground here and there, and the mountain tops were yet white; but he felt he would have little difficulty in traveling.

The Haunted Ranch, where Wild Bill had his home, had once been a mine, and the discovery of that mine had caused the former owners to be mysteriously put to death by unknown parties.

But Wild Bill, as told in the romance of "Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot," had solved the mystery of the ghostly forms seen at the ranch, and which had given it the name of being haunted, and continued to dwell there with no dread of unearthly visitants.

He had, as his companions, Boss Bricktop, head herdsman of the ranch, a border character whom he had thrashed severely and thereby gained his everlasting friendship, and two young cowboys, whose duties consisted in looking after the cattle and ponies that pastured in the valleys, and on the plains near by.

No more desirable situation for the home of a man, whose life was in daily danger of death, could be found than the Haunted Ranch, for its approaches were such that it was a regular stronghold, and the power of its owner to hold it against superior numbers had been severely tested on more than one occasion.

"Waal, ef it hain't good fer sore eyes ter see yer, pard, then string me up fer a Chinee."

"I feerd yer hed tanned yer toes up ter ther daisies, an' we were jist talkin' about goin' ter Poker City ter clean out ther whole durned town out of revenge."

"Wasn't we Sam?"

The speaker was Boss Bricktop, a red-headed specimen of the border *genus homo*, that was a curiosity in his way.

The one he appealed to, with a little more regard for truth, was one of the two cowboys—wild, harum-scarum fellows that loved the life they led more than any other that could be offered them—and he replied:

"We were going to Poker City, fer a fact, cap'n; but I don't know about our cleanin' out ther place, bed they tanned up yer toes thar."

"But we'd 'a' seen yer wasn't forgot in ther revenge reck'nin' I guess."

"Yas, them as hed called in yer chips, we wuld hav' spotted," added Dick, the second cowboy.

"I thank you, boys; but my chips haven't been called in yet."

"Get us some dinner, Dick, and a good one, for I am as hungry as a grizzly, and you, Brick, tell me if you have seen any strange trails about here lately?" and Wild Bill threw himself down on a bearskin before the cheerful fire in the cabin.

"Nary trail, but thar were suthin' as went by this mornin' arly thet looked like a gerizzly bar on horseback."

"I tho't a cirkiss hed bu'st loose at first, fer he were covered with ha'r; but he kep' straight on, an' as I hedn't loss any sich indervidoal, I jist let him go, tho' I told Sam an' Dick they mout bev him."

"Thankee, Sam an' Dick hadn't loss sich a animile nuther, an' so on he went, pushin' his horse like the Devil were on him," said Sam.

"It was the Mad Giant, and I am on his trail," said Wild Bill, and he went on to tell his cowboys the story of his battle with the Giant Sports, for in his visit to his ranch, after seeing Red Dove and her escorts on the Overland stage, he had made known to the ranchmen

the arrival of these worthies and Edna Insley, and what had followed.

A rest of a couple of hours, and mounted upon a regular mountain horse, that could climb where a goat could, Wild Bill set off once more on the trail of the madman, carrying with him a well-filled haversack of provisions.

Once more striking the trail, he followed it at a rapid canter, while Bricktop and his companions stood in front of the cabin watching him as far as they could see him, and registering bets regarding the success of his undertaking.

"I bets a hundred that he holds trumps clean through the game," said Bricktop.

His bet was taken by both cowboys, not from a doubt of Wild Bill's lack of nerve, but because they were natural gamblers, and they took the chances.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE COMBAT IN THE CAVERN.

To one who read all signs pertaining to wood and prairie craft, it was as plain as an open book to him that the horse of the Mad Giant had been driven too hard.

The tracks swayed from side to side, and there were evidences of the animal having frequently stumbled.

At last the trail went upon a solid rock foundation, from which every vestige of snow had been blown by the fierce winds, and no tracks were visible.

Up the hillside, however, was a dark object that caught the eye of Wild Bill.

Hastening toward it he discovered that it was the horse of the Mad Giant.

His brave heart had broken at last, and the noble animal lay dead on the trail, having fallen under the cruel driving of his mad rider.

But nowhere visible was that rider, and the rock foundation gave no sign of which course he had taken.

Night was coming on, and with it a threatening storm, and Wild Bill was determined to find shelter.

If the storm was very severe he would, the next morning, wend his way back to his ranch.

If it was not severe, he would press on into the heart of the mountains after the objects of his search, who were more important to be found, he thought, than the Mad Giant.

Should the latter secure another horse and make another dash into Poker City, he would find men there to meet him, and a lucky shot might bring him down.

But with Edna Insley it was different.

She was alone, and a young girl in the power of a man whom Wild Bill distrusted more and more.

She had been lured away for some purpose, he felt assured, and find her he would, if in the power of man to do so.

His horse he had perfect confidence in, in the severest strain, and he was anxious to continue on; but he must camp for the night, he knew, and he went toward a distant hill, where he expected to find some sheltered canyon.

As he came near the hill he saw a canyon opening, and to his delight found a large cavern in the rocky cliff.

It was now almost dark, and he lariated his pony out in the canyon, where he would get good grazing, and carried his saddle and wraps into the cave to make himself comfortable.

He gathered some wood and soon started a fire, and then, to his surprise, saw that the cavern had had an occupant before him.

A freshly killed bear-skin was back in one corner, and there was a pile of logs, the embers of a fire, and quantities of game hanging up on the walls.

"The home of the Mad Giant, as I live!"

"I am in luck."

The discovery was one which most men would not have looked upon as a lucky one; but Wild Bill was of a caliber that dared every danger.

With the utmost coolness he opened his haversack to eat his supper, made a cup of coffee, and having placed his revolver and knife by his side, where he could grasp them at a moment's notice, began upon his meal.

The light of the fire prevented his penetrating the darkness without, and he failed to see a huge form coming toward the cavern.

It was the Mad Giant, and he carried upon his shoulders a deer wh'ch he had slain.

His face was wild and haggard, his hair and beard unkempt, and his eyes deep sunken and savage.

His hands, face and clothing were stained red with blood, and he was certainly a most awe-inspiring being.

He stopped suddenly at detecting the fire-light streaming out of the cavern, and glared with the ferocity of a savage beast into the cavern.

But he could not see the sheltered form of Wild Bill.

Down he threw his load, and drew a revolver.

But with a fiendish smile he replaced it, and jerked his long knife from his belt.

He felt its edge and point with malicious delight, unbuckled his belt, threw aside his bear-skin coat and wolf-skin cap, and crept toward the cavern.

Still Wild Bill ate on, unconscious of the approach of a very demon.

That the man was mad there was no doubt, for the bullet of Wild Bill had plowed its way along the skull, and the shock had made him a maniac, though otherwise the wound would not have been dangerous.

Nearing the fire he paused an instant.

But the crackling of the burning wood drowned his hoarse breathing.

At last, as he crept close against the side of the wall, he spied Wild Bill calmly eating his supper.

Mad though he was he knew the man.

He recognized the one that had killed his giant pard and had wounded him, and then, with the bound of a panther, and a shriek such as a lost one might give utterance to when hurled into Perdition, he sprung clear over the fire and upon the invader of his mad retreat.

His great weight and the force of his mighty spring carried him right upon Wild Bill, who was knocked over by the blow.

But it carried him beyond the weapons he had so cautiously laid by his side for ready use, and he could only grasp the savage hand that held the knife, ere the keen blade was driven to his heart.

Though wholly taken by surprise, Wild Bill's superb pluck and iron nerve did not for a second desert him, for he got a grip on the wrist of the madman, which the other could not shake off, and almost at the same instant drove his steely fist full into the savage face.

But the blow did not seem to hurt the giant, and with his disengaged hand he attempted to return it.

But there Wild Bill met him well, and warded off every stroke, as he was scienced in the pugilistic art.

Finding that his own blows, fearful as they were, made no impression upon the madman, Wild Bill determined to get a clutch upon his throat.

The madman seemed to act not from his own ideas, but those of his foe's, and at once the example being set him, he too tried to grip the throat of the ranchero.

In the effort of each to escape the steely clutch of the other the two men rolled over and over upon the rocky flooring of the cavern.

The strength of the giant was great, and madness but added to it; but Wild Bill was equally as strong, and his slender form was more agile, and his movements as quick as lightning.

Over and over the cavern floor they fought, neither seeming to gain an advantage, other than a savage blow that Wild Bill now and then got in, full in the face of his mad antagonist.

Once the madman seemed to hold the advantage, for in the roll across the cavern, they stopped against the rocky wall, with the giant on top.

A shout of triumph burst from his lips; but it was short lived, for with a lightning movement, and mighty effort, Wild Bill managed to seize the bushy hair of his enemy in his teeth, and close to the left side of his head.

The hair was too heavy and thick to give, even under the savage jerks the Mad Giant gave to tear it out by the roots, and the example having been set him of using his teeth, he endeavored to fasten his teeth in the shoulder of Wild Bill, who, realizing that a bite from him would prove as terrible as from a rabid dog, exerted an almost superhuman strength to master him, and prevent his accomplishing his purpose.

The knife the madman still grasped in his hand, but the wrist was as though in a vise, and he had no power to use it; but Wild Bill, feeling that the end must soon come, for even he could not keep up that killing work much

longer, watched his chance, and suddenly twisting the madman's wrist, until the blade-point was against the heart of his foe, put forth his entire strength, and having already braced one foot against the cavern wall, made a sudden turn.

Instantly the position of the two men was reversed, and Wild Bill felt the grip of the madman relax, and knew that the knife had done its work.

The effort had rolled him again underneath the madman; but he quickly threw him off, and staggered to his feet.

The firelight revealed the huge giant, savage in death, and his hand still grasping the hilt of his own knife, which the sudden turn of Wild Bill had caused to pierce his heart.

It was a ghastly, sickening sight, and the Ranchero turned away and walked toward the mouth of the cavern to cool his heated blood, and rest after the terrible struggle he had gone through.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A JUBILEE IN POKER CITY.

As two of the wounds of Wild Bill, received in his first fight with the Giant Sports, had reopened, he felt that to continue on into the mountains would be madness, and he therefore decided to retrace his way to the ranch.

Dressing his wounds as well as he could under the circumstances, he mounted his hardy mustang, and started on the back trail.

It was after midnight when the dogs warned Bricktop that somebody was without, and the next instant there came the well-known hail of the Ranchero.

One glance at Wild Bill as he entered the cabin was sufficient to show Boss Bricktop that he had won his bet, and he called out:

"Pards, I'll trouble yer fer that leetle hundred dollars, arter we has made ther cap'n comf'table."

Upon examination, the wound in Wild Bill's side, which had reopened, had an ugly look, and he determined to at once continue on to Poker City and place himself under the care of Doctor Medway.

"Thet are ther ticket, cap'n, fer that Bonesawer kin cut ther leg o' a corpse off an' not hurt it, an' he'll fetch yer round all right with his pills an' plasters.

"But don't let him use his knife an' saws on yer, or he'll cut yer all up ter see jist how much 'twill take ter kill yer," advised Bricktop.

"You go with me, Sam," said Wild Bill, and he added:

"I'll ride Midnight."

"Right are yer, cap'n, fer he are as sweet a goer as rockin' in a char my old granny ust ter hev, an' lick me when she cotched me in it too."

"Sam'll go with you, an' me an' Dick will go back to ther cavern with a horse an' pack ther Mad Giant inter Poker City, an' ef ther hull town don't git drunk over ther fun o' buryin' him, then I are a weepin' hypercrit."

Ten minutes after Wild Bill and cowboy Sam started for Poker City, and Bricktop and Dick, under the direction of the Ranchero, departed for the body of the Mad Giant.

It was late in the morning when Wild Bill and the cowboy rode into the mining town, and the former was as white as a ghost, and very weak, for he had been steadily bleeding all the way.

To the cheers that greeted him he had not the strength to raise his sombrero, and cowboy Sam explained this lack of courtesy on the part of the ranchero by saying continually:

"Ther cap'n hev hed ther devil o' a carouse, pards, an' he needs ther pill-stuffer's 'tentio' immegit."

Arriving at the Ranchero's Exchange Wild Bill was taken from his horse and carried to his room, and Doctor Medway was promptly on hand, and soon had him as comfortable as was possible.

But at nightfall a strange cavalcade came in sight, coming up the street toward the Ranchero's Exchange, and all along the crowd was gaining perceptibly that followed it.

The cavalcade consisted of but three horses and three riders; but the third hung across his horse, and was dead.

It was Boss Bricktop, cowboy Dick, and the body of the Mad Giant, and the two escorts seemed to feel their importance as much as though they had been instrumental in bringing the life of the huge sport to a close.

The news had already been diligently cir-

culated by cowboy Sam, who was invited to drink every time he told the story, of the killing of the Mad Giant by Wild Bill, and the shout that went up when Bricktop and the ghastly form reached the Ranchero's Exchange, awoke the ranchero from a sound sleep, and caused the doctor to rush out of the room of the wounded man with torrents of profanity to pour upon the crowd.

But when he saw the cause of the cheering his face lighted up with a smile, and he called Bricktop aside and said:

"Say, Brick, I've got the other, and I want that one's skeleton too, and my fortune's made; come in and take something."

To "take something" was the main reason why Bricktop had come to Poker City, he well knowing that as the bearer of the body of the Giant Madman, he would be treated by every one in town, down to the Chinese waiters in the Ranchero's Exchange.

Once at the bar before Carrots, and Bricktop seemed to become a fixture, and over and over again he told the story of the fight in the cavern, as new arrivals entered, and each time he dilated upon it, and "took suthin'" until he at last made himself the hero of the combat, and too drunk themselves to know the difference, his auditors cheered him as a hero.

In another part of the spacious saloon the cowboys, Sam and Dick were giving their version of what they had not seen, and about which Wild Bill had said but little, and as they were also treated with the regularity of a running clock, they too got jubilant, and ere midnight Poker City was a scene of the wildest orgies, in the midst of which the Mad Giant was buried by torch-light, and cheers for Wild Bill made the hours hideous until dawn, when, with aching heads Bricktop and his two brother herders started on their return to the Haunted Ranch, not knowing whose heads they had on their shoulders, and as limber as though every bone in their bodies was broken.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CABIN IN THE CANYON.

IT is now about time to return to the fearful snow-storm in the mountains, the night that Edna Insley so suddenly disappeared over the cliff.

She had perfect confidence in the guiding of Old Buckskin, in spite of the obstacles in his way, and had reined her horse back rather impatiently, as Wonder seemed rather more anxious to lead than be led, so that he could find shelter from the tempest.

The jerk on the bit caused the horse to swerve a little, and instantly the bank of snow beneath his feet went down.

He felt himself going and tried to bound to a firm foundation, but it was useless, and down he went with the mass of snow.

Hardly able to realize that she was falling, Edna uttered no cry, and, in fact, so rapid was the fall, she hardly understood what had happened until she found her downward flight was checked and she was buried under tons of soft, flaky snow.

Her horse seemed unhurt, though momentarily dazed with surprise, and, having kept her saddle, she knew she had sustained no injury.

How far she had fallen she did not know, and as all was darkness, she had no means of ascertaining.

For an instant Wonder seemed to be endeavoring to recover from his astonishment, and then he made strenuous efforts to cast off the weight of snow upon him.

Floundering violently for awhile, he would then rest, and once more making an effort, aided by Edna with her arms, he at last succeeded in getting out of the snow-bank, and stood panting with it only reaching a little above his knees.

As her eyes became accustomed to the surroundings, Edna saw rising above her a steep hill fully a hundred feet in height, and she knew that down the sloping side of this she had come on Wonder's back.

Had there not been such a heavy fall of snow she knew that the death of herself and horse would have been instantaneous.

But, as it was, they had come down with a few tons, and found a drift of as many more to fall upon, which had saved her.

Raising her voice she cried loudly for Old Buckskin.

But only the howling of the storm answered her.

Then she gave herself up as lost, and was almost in utter despair.

She was shivering with cold, and her horse was trembling too, and which way to go she did not know.

Alone, in the heart of a trackless mountain, with a fierce storm raging around her, and knowing of no succor, the wonder is that she did not go mad.

But hers was a brave heart, and she determined not to give up and to hope while life remained.

"Come, Wonder, we are in for it, and I yield myself to your instinct.

"Find us some sheltered nook from these cold winds, for I have matches and we will have a fire to warm ourselves.

"Come, good horse, all depends upon you."

She dropped the reins on the neck of the horse as she spoke, and, as though understanding her words, he moved forward at a brisk walk.

Eagerly she watched him, and was almost breathless with hope as she saw him stop after awhile and sniff the air, as though something unusual had come to his keen sense of smell.

"What is it, Wonder?

"Perhaps it is Old Buckskin," and with that hope she called loudly.

But only the echo of her voice came back to her upon the howling storm.

Suddenly she checked a cry upon her lips, and said:

"It may be he scents danger, so I did wrong to call out."

"Go on, Wonder, if there is no danger."

Again the horse moved forward, and floundering through the snow for the distance of a mile, he suddenly gave a low whinny of delight.

Shading her eyes from the driving snow, Edna Insley beheld a glimmer ahead.

Was it a hallucination?

Was it really a light?

Eagerly she peered ahead, and then she knew that she was not mistaken, for before her she distinctly saw a light.

Quickly she urged Wonder forward once more; but the intelligent horse needed little urging and struggled on through the deep snow and drifts.

Was it Old Buckskin?

Was it an Indian camp?

Such were the thoughts flashing through Edna's mind.

But soon the question was answered, as she came upon a hut right against an overhanging mountain.

The door of the hut was ajar, and through the opening came the light she had seen, and which was from a fire within.

It was a small hut, stoutly built, it seemed, and yet to her no palace could have been more welcome.

She hailed, and yet no one answered.

She called again, and again, and still no voice replied.

In amazement she glanced around her, and saw, not far away, another cabin.

Toward this she rode, but within it all was dark, and soon she discovered that the door of this hut was open too.

Here Wonder wished to enter, and this told her it was a stable.

"You shall go in, good horse, and find a warm shelter, and I'll look somebody up about this place, or I'll freeze," and she slipped to the ground, and turned Wonder loose.

Instantly he entered the cabin-stable, and Edna said firmly:

"I'll follow your example, and make myself at home."

She walked to the other cabin and glanced in through the open door.

A log fire blazed cheerily upon the large hearth, and her eyes, at a glance, took in the contents of the little cabin.

A rustic cot, upon which was spread bear and buffalo skins, and a red blanket; a saddle hanging upon the wall, and a rifle and shot-guns on brackets, with a belt of arms suspended by a peg; a bear-skin chair, a table and rude cupboard comprised the furniture.

But where was the occupant or occupants?

Nowhere visible, and in Edna walked, for she could no longer resist the temptation of drawing near the inviting fire.

Down in the bear-skin chair she sank, and the ruddy glow, the cheerful heat, added to her fatigue soon overcame her, and she dropped to sleep to awake with a start, to find crouching down within a few feet of her one of those terrors of the far western mountains, even more to be dreaded than the grizzly bear—the mountain lion.

Its tail was wagging to and fro, its eyes were glaring upon her, and his attitude was crouching, as though ready for the fatal spring.

She tried to believe she was asleep and was visited by a hideous nightmare.

But no, the savage brute was uttering a low growl, the white teeth were too real, and unable to stand the fearful strain upon her nerves she fainted.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SAVAGE AND THE BRUTE.

WHEN Edna Insley returned to consciousness she still sat in the bear-skin chair before the fire.

She rubbed her eyes to see if she was awake, and then looked around again at what she believed was an apparition.

Upon a stool at one side of the hearth sat a human being calmly making a fire.

Upon the other side of the hearth was the mountain lion that had so frightened her, and he still had his glaring eyes fixed upon her.

Figuratively speaking she was between two fires, the lion and an Indian, and she would have almost preferred death by the real fire in front of her, than at the hands of the one, or the teeth of the other.

She shook herself and sat up, and the lion growled.

At this the Indian spoke sharply and the animal laid down, content to let him manage matters.

The savage then attracted the attention of Edna more particularly.

He was a man of large size, well along in years, and had about as much mercy in his face as the brute opposite to him possessed.

He was decked out most gayly in feathers, beads, fringed buckskin leggings and hunting shirt, and innumerable brass rings, and a necklace of beads of all colors.

This fact Edna particularly noticed, and a good reader of human nature, even under a red complexion, she at once decided that, Indian, old and ugly though he was, he was a dandy, egotistical, arrogant, vain and selfish.

His other faults she feared she would too soon discover also.

He glanced at her as she revived, scolded the lion, and relapsed into the enjoyment of his pipe.

No surprise was manifested at her being there, no questions as to when she came, where from, how long she expected to stay, or if she liked the country.

With a steady look at his face, which amounted to a stare, Edna Insley read that red man of the mountain, and without a word she calmly took off her watch and chain and handed it to him.

He took it pretty much as a cat might pounce upon a mouse, and gave a gratified:

"Ugh?"

What U-g-h meant Edna had no means of knowing, so she watched the untutored savage take her chain, tie one end of it in the ring of the watch, and hang it around his neck, *a la* locket.

That he was a shade happier than he was before he received the costly gift was evident, and Edna began to calculate just how happy it was in her power to make him.

She had a belt of gold with her, but wished to hold that in reserve, so she took off a ruby ring and handed it to him.

It would not go on the tip of his little finger — called little by courtesy only — and he hung it on the chain, and fastened his eye on a diamond she wore.

Of course it was handed to him and brought forth another:

"Ugh!"

"I've risked three hundred dollars on the old savage now, and I'll see if he can talk," muttered Edna, and she opened with:

"You great chief, aren't you?"

"Yes, Snake-with-wings great chief," was the guttural response.

"I thought so; most big chiefs are great chiefs," returned Edna, and she added *sotto voce*:

"I wish I had your wings, Mr. Snake."

Aloud she said:

"Snake-with-wings fine name."

"Yes."

"Been here long?"

"Long time."

"Live here, don't you?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Any family to speak of ex-

cepting that savage brute?" and she glanced at the lion.

"Ugh." Here Edna was at sea again.

"Is that beast tame?"

"Good."

"He don't look it."

"Yes."

"Then he does, for I agree with Snake-with-wings in everything."

"Ugh."

"That's what I want to know, what is ugh?"

"Ugh!"

"That's what I thought. Are you a Sioux?"

"Cheyenne! Sioux heap bad Injuns."

"So I think. I like Cheyennes."

Snake-with-wings seemed pleased at this, for he grinned; but as the relaxation of the muscles of his face seemed to give him pain, Edna was determined not to say anything to provoke another smile.

"All alone?" she asked.

"Have lion."

"I'd rather be alone," said Edna with a shudder.

"Bad storm," and she pointed out of the door, which was now closed.

"Ugh."

"I am cold and hungry. Will Snake-with-wings give me something to eat and let me stay here?" she asked, determined by a desperate effort to make herself at home.

"Yes."

"My horse is in the other cabin."

"Yes."

"I'll cook my supper, if you'll only tell me where to find it?"

The Indian arose and walked to the cupboard; but, as he put his hand on it, there came a loud hail without.

The lion sprung to his feet with a savage growl, and the Indian cried:

"It is pale-face chief. Him talk to white squaw."

With this he left the cabin, followed by the mountain lion, and poor Edna sat wondering if the new-comer was on a par with the two occupants of the cabin she had become acquainted with.

"He may be worse, and, if so, may Heaven have mercy upon me," she murmured.

The next instant the door was flung open and the one whom Snake-with-wings had called the pale-face chief stepped across the threshold of the cabin, and, at sight of him Edna Insley sprung to her feet with a surprised cry upon her lips.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN APPEAL BY LETTER.

To have been the victor in his combat with the two Giant Sports together, and afterward with the madman, was certainly cause for congratulation upon the part of Wild Bill, and under ordinary circumstances, he might have borne patiently his long illness.

But, as week after week went by, and he was still confined to his room in the Exchange Ranchero he grew terribly impatient, for his thoughts were constantly wandering to the mountains, and over and over again would he ask himself the question:

"What has become of that poor girl, Edna Insley?"

Having caught cold in his wounds and had fever set in, which was followed by days of delirium, it was a long time before Wild Bill was able to sit up.

But once he did get better his convalescence was rapid, and the doctor, who had been most attentive to him, said that when he regained his strength, he would be even better as a man than he was before.

For amusement, and at the same time to keep in practice, when he got better, Wild Bill had a target put up in his room, and was wont to spend hours in shooting with his revolvers at the smallest possible objects.

Then he would throw his bowie-knife until he could send the point just where he aimed, and afterward practiced with a bow and arrow.

At last he was able to leave his room, and when he entered the dining-hall of the Exchange, leaning on the doctor's arm, there was a burst of applause that made the dishes rattle, and sent the Chinese waiters, who did not observe the cause, flying to the kitchen in terror.

From that day Wild Bill's recovery was rapid, and he soon was able to mount *Midnight*, and go down the valley for a few miles' run.

"I'm myself again, Governor, and to-morrow I start for the mountains," said Wild Bill one day.

"On the same old trail, Bill?" asked Dave.

"Yes."

"After the girl?"

"After Miss Insley."

"You don't think she is dead?"

"No."

"Escaped freezing, you think?"

"Yes."

"I doubt it."

"I do not, for Old Buckskin was no man to get caught in the mountains in a storm, from which he could not extricate himself."

"What in thunder did he take her there for?"

"That's what I am determined to find out."

"You'll find it up-hill work."

"I think not."

"Suppose there has been some black work going on, Bill?"

"Then the guilty one answers to me."

"I guess you are a little gone on the girl, Bill?"

"I'll tell you one thing, Governor Dave, and that is that I allow no insinuations from you, or any other man, regarding my conduct."

"That lady has met with misfortunes and sorrows, and she sought my aid and protection, and I will not hear her spoken lightly of, and that you shall understand, if you make the attempt to do so."

Wild Bill spoke calmly; but Dave knew that he was not the man to trifle with, and he hastily said:

"Why, Bill, I am the last man to slander that sweet lady, and I am sorry you understand me that way."

"I know you, Dave, and have heard how hard you tried to win favor in her eyes, and that you nearly got shot by Old Buckskin for playing the sneak, so don't sing your virtues to me, only take warning, if you don't want a quarrel with me."

"If you do, say so."

"I don't, Bill, as you know, so accept my apology, and let us take a drink."

"Come on, Bill — Ah! there is the stage-horn."

They both went to the door, and the next instant up dashed the stage-coach from the East, with Andy Rush on the box.

The mail was at once distributed around, and there was one letter for Wild Bill.

It was addressed in a neat, feminine hand as follows:

"For

"J. B. HIKOK —

"Wild Bill — The Pistol Dead Shot,

"Ranchero's Exchange,

"Poker City,

"Overland."

The handwriting Wild Bill did not recognize; but breaking the seal he read:

"Come to me. I need you. RED DOVE."

"Governor, there comes the west-bound stage, so hold it until I am ready, for I go in it," he said quickly.

"Where do you go, Bill?" asked the curious landlord.

"You go to the devil," was the stern response, as Wild Bill walked off in the direction of Sloan's store.

"Sloan, give me two thousand dollars of my money," he said.

"All right, Bill," and the money was counted out to him.

"Good-by, for I go to St. Louis for a short time," and ten minutes after Wild Bill was on the box of the Eastern-bound stage, obeying the earnest appeal of Red Dove, the Indian Heiress.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A LAWYER MEETS HIS MATCH.

To say that both Red Dove and Iron Eyes were not pleased with their experiences, as they traveled eastward, would not be true, for they were delighted, and Mark Manning did all in his power for their comfort and enjoyment, and wholly won the confidence of the pretty Indian Heiress and her half brother.

As they reached the larger cities they were amazed at the greatness of the pale-faces, and were quite awed when at last they arrived in St. Louis.

It was night when they set foot in the city, and procuring an open carriage Mark Manning drove them through the brightly lighted town on their way to their destination.

He had already telegraphed on ahead of his coming, and after a long drive the vehicle drew up at the very cottage on the banks of the Mississippi, where nearly a year before Captain Loring had been assassinated.

The same old man and woman then there, still remained, and welcomed the young lawyer and his Indian companions, and they were shown to their respective rooms, after enjoying a good supper.

Several days were allowed to Red Dove and Iron Eyes to rest and look about them, while Mark Manning passed his time up in the city, and then he said all arrangements were ready for the transfer of the young girl's property to her keeping.

But here came in an act of the young lawyer, that first brought suspicion upon him on the part of Red Dove.

That was when one evening he brought two companions out from the city with him, and all urged that she should sign certain papers.

This she would have done, had it not been for the Indian cunning of Iron Eyes, who at once said:

"The Red Dove must know what it is that she puts her name to."

"D— that Injun," said one of the visitors in a low tone.

But, taking the cue from her brother, Red Dove insisted upon reading the documents she was told to put her signature to, and they were withheld from her, Mark Manning remarking:

"Oh! it is a matter of no importance, Red Dove, and any other time will do, and then I'll have time to read the papers to you and explain them fully."

"Let the Red Dove keep the papers," said Iron Eyes, and his suggestion brought forth another anathema upon his head, and the remark:

"That Injun had better study law, for he'd be a good one."

But the papers were not left with the young girl, and shortly after the two visitors left the cottage, but stood for a long time out by the carriage talking with Mark Manning.

Thus some weeks passed away, and Mark Manning seemed more kind than ever, heaping upon both Red Dove and Iron Eyes costly presents, taking them to the city to see the sights, and buying for them a boat to row upon the river in, and horses to ride over the surrounding country on, an amusement they seemed to take the greatest pleasure in.

When he thought the remembrance of the doubt which he saw they had felt for him had passed away, Mark Manning again brought the papers out and quietly asked Red Dove to sign them as they sat at the table one evening after supper.

Again she would have complied, when Iron Eyes asked:

"Are they the same papers the Book Chief wanted the Red Dove to put her name on before?"

"Yes, and it is a mere matter of form, which I can explain to the Red Dove."

"No; the papers are not the same, for the Iron Eyes does not see crooked," said the young Indian warrior.

"Does the Iron Eyes doubt the Book Chief?" asked Mark Manning, biting his lip.

"The Iron Eyes knows a straight tongue when he hears it talk, and the Red Dove will not do as the Book Chief says."

"Am I not the guardian of the Red Dove, and must she not do as I say?" angrily asked the lawyer.

"When the Red Dove has seen eighteen summers go by, then she can write her name to the Book Chief's papers, but not before, for it is not right."

"The Iron Eyes is wrong."

"The Red Dove will do as the Iron Eyes tells her."

With something strangely like muttered profanity Mark Manning arose from the table and said no more upon the subject.

The next day the Iron Eyes went out to the river to fish, while Red Dove mounted her horse for a gallop.

When she returned she was met by Mark Manning, who told her that he had sent Iron Eyes to the Indian country after her friend, the Pistol Dead Shot.

The young girl seemed very sorry that she had not seen her brother before his departure, and glad that Wild Bill was coming; but the lawyer explained that there had that day a wagon train left for the vicinity of Poker City,

and the chance to have Iron Eyes go with it was too good to be lost.

With this Red Dove seemed satisfied, and had only to count the long days until the return of Iron Eyes and Wild Bill.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A DOVE IN A TRAP.

AFTER the departure of Iron Eyes Mark Manning seemed to redouble his kindnesses to Red Dove, and tried every way in his power to obliterate any mistrust she had entertained of him.

He took her riding and driving with him, rowed with her upon the river, taught her from books which she fancied, bestowed innumerable presents upon her, and then was chagrined to have her say:

"The Dead Shot will be pleased to find his red sister knows so much, and has such pretty presents."

One night the same two men who had before visited the cottage came down from the city with the lawyer, and by persuading her, Mark Manning got Red Dove to sign her names—for she bore her mother's name of Louisa Loring, and the one the Indians had given her—to the papers Iron Eyes had prevented her signing on the two former occasions.

Red Dove could hardly believe that if Wild Bill trusted the lawyer, he could have a wicked heart and crooked tongue, and as Manning told her that the Pistol Dead Shot would be pleased with what she had done, she seized the pen and wrote her names firmly in her pretty, feminine style of penmanship.

"Now, my sweet girl," said the smooth-faced one of the two visitors, stand there by Mr. Manning's side, and repeat after me what I say."

Red Dove did as directed, having seen and heard Mark Manning go through the same form, and until the last fatal words were spoken, so glibly had the man twisted his sentences, she had no idea of what she was doing.

Those fatal words were, spoken in loud, distinct tones:

"I pronounce you man and wife, and those whom God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Poor, innocent girl, she had been inveigled into a marriage with Mark Manning, having just signed the papers, and starting back from his side she stood terrified at what she had done.

A few more weeks and she would be eighteen, when, by the terms of the will she was her own mistress, and her property was her own.

But, should she marry before that time, she would be the slave of her husband, as it were, and he would control her fortune.

This much of the will she knew, and she now saw through the trap the lawyer had set to catch her.

And, guileless Indian girl that she was, she had walked into the snare, the trigger had been sprung, and though loving Wild Bill to idolatry, and hoping that some day he would return that love, she was the wife of a man she now hated in the inmost depths of her heart, and for Red Dove to hate was to make her revengeful toward the one she hated, for in that particular her Indian blood exerted itself thoroughly.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A RESCUE AND A CONFESSION.

IF Mark Manning, Attorney at Law, had congratulated himself upon his strategy in getting Red Dove into his power, and inveigling her into a marriage with him, which gave him control of her fortune, he was not long in finding out that he had entrapped one who could not be easily tamed.

Calm, defiant she remained toward him day after day, and seemed to only live with the hope that ere long Wild Bill and Iron Eyes must come, for, in his story regarding her half-brother, she had confidence.

At first Mark Manning feared that the young girl would try to escape from him, and make her way back to her people, and he had her steps constantly dogged, and well for her was it, that she did not make the attempt.

One day she was seated on the small piazza of the cottage, brooding, as was her custom of late.

Suddenly she caught sight of a skiff floating down the river, and in it was a small child.

Instantly she ran down to the shore, sprung into her own boat, and rowed swiftly toward

the little skiff, coming rapidly down with the current.

Presently she heard a cry in a childish voice, and a splash, and glancing around, she saw that the little one had fallen into the river.

With renewed energy she pulled at the oars, and a moment after seized the child by the frock and drew it into the boat.

It was unconscious, and pulling back to the cottage, she put it in her own bed and soon revived it.

She knew the child, and was thinking of rowing it back to the cabin home of its parents upon the river bank, half a mile above the cottage, when the half distracted father rushed into the house, for some one riding along the other shore had seen the rescue and told the poor man of it.

He was deeply moved, and after pressing the child again and again to his heart, he said:

"You may be a Injun, miss, but you are a true leddy, and your heart is in the right place.

"Row up to the cabin with us, miss, that my old 'ooman may thank you, and besides, I have something to tell you."

Red Dove consented to go with them and bring the boat back, and it was while the man was pulling slowly up against the stream that she heard that Iron Eyes had not gone to the West.

"No, miss; your brother went to the Happy Hunting Grounds instead, if that is what you Injuns calls Heaven.

"I was a-sitting on a log in the bayou fishin' and seen him coming up in the canoe he made for himself out of bark.

"Suddenly I heard a rifle crack, and the young Injun boy fell forward in his canoe, and the paddle dropped from his hand.

"I was that scared I couldn't move or cry out, and I saw who it was that shot him, for he came rowing up in this very boat, miss.

"And he caught the canoe, and dragging the young Injun into his boat, tied some old pieces of iron to his body and threw him overboard.

"Down he sunk forever, and the man rowed back, taking the canoe with him.

"I seen it all, miss, and at first I thought I'd tell; but then I wanted some money very bad, to pay off the mortgage on my little farm, and I determined to get it, so I went up to the city the next day and told the man what I seen him do, and I got the money, one thousand dollars, and I paid off all on the place, and have got some left.

"But you saved my child, miss, and I'm your friend, so I tells you now, your brother has gone further away than to the West, and it'll take Gabriel's trumpet to call him back."

Not a word did Red Dove say to interrupt the man's story, and not a movement of her lovely face showed the emotion she felt.

But when he had finished his confession, she asked in a low tone:

"Who was the man that killed the Iron Eyes?"

"It was Lawyer Mark Manning!"

Still no word from Red Dove's lips, and the man seemed to feel, from her manner, that he had been mistaken in saying her heart was in the right place.

CHAPTER XL.

A DOVE WITH EAGLE'S TALONS.

"I THOUGHT my sweet bird of the forest would come around in the end," said Mark Manning to himself on the day of Red Dove's rescue of the little child from drowning.

He had returned home from the city, considerably fatigued over his day's work, and to his great surprise had been welcomed with a smile from Red Dove.

"You seem happy, Red Dove," he said pleasantly.

"The Red Dove is happy," was the smiling reply.

Then she got his slippers for him, and poured out his cup of coffee, and completely enraptured the lawyer with her sweet ways.

"What makes my red bird so happy tonight?" asked the lawyer.

"Oh! she knows it is 'most time for the Iron Eyes to return with the great white chief Dead Shot."

"Yes, they should soon be here," he said quietly, and then added:

"The Red Dove loves the Dead Shot so dearly, I fear I shall be jealous."

"Oh, no; the Dead Shot is the pale-face brother of the Red Dove."

"He is as one of her people."

"Would the Red Dove like to return to her people?"

"She will return with the Iron Eyes and the Dead Shot."

"But suppose they should not be able to come, would she not like to return?"

"Yes."

"When would she like to go?"

"When will the Iron Eyes return?"

"It is not certain, for I saw a Gold Digger from Poker City to-day, and he says the people of the Red Bird are at war with their old foes, and that the Dead Shot is a chief under the Black Bear."

"Then the Iron Eyes will not come back now, or the Dead Shot either?"

"So I think."

"What shall the Red Dove do?"

"Return to her people."

"And the chief?"

"Oh! I will remain here for awhile and attend to some business for the Red Dove, and then join her at the village of the Black Bear."

"Will the Red Dove go alone?"

"Oh, no! I have some friends who will take her."

"When shall she go?"

"In one week."

"The Red Dove will be ready."

At this Mark Manning seemed delighted, and the next day he seemed to have a light heart as he drove away to the city.

But hardly had he been gone two hours, when the man who had told Red Dove the fate of Iron Eyes, came to the cottage, and poured into her ears a story of a plot Mark Manning had formed to get rid of her.

She was to start for the West, apparently, under his, the narrator's care, and he was to kill her, and returning with proof of her death, was to receive a large sum in gold.

The Red Dove smiled sweetly at the news, as though it really pleased her, and the man took his departure, wondering more than ever at the strange Indian girl, who did not seem to feel her brother's death, and appeared pleased when told she was to be put out of the way.

But the depth of that Indian girl's heart was too deep to be seen by a white man's eye, and with her smiling face Red Dove went on with her plot for revenge.

Again Mark Manning came to his cottage home, and again he was welcomed with a smile, and his coffee was poured out for him by most willing hands.

But, hardly had he drank the cup's contents when he turned deadly pale and attempted to rise to his feet.

"Great God! Dove, send for a doctor, for I am very ill," he cried in pleading tones.

Straight before him she came, and looking him straight in the face she said in calm, distinct tones:

"You are dying, for the Red Dove has given you poison."

"You killed the Iron Eyes, wronged her, and would have had her murdered, but she kills you instead."

"The Iron Eyes and the Red Dove are avenged."

He tried to speak, but could not, and with a groan his head fell upon the table.

Another moment and he was dead.

But there was one who had seen and heard all, and that was the old woman, the house-keeper of the cottage, and instantly she gave the alarm, and soon the hounds of the law were upon the trail of the Indian girl, who had taken flight, and she was taken, carried to St. Louis, and thrown into prison as a murderer.

Then it was that she wrote to Wild Bill the pleading lines:

"Come to me! I need you."

CHAPTER XLI.

WILD BILL PLAYS ANOTHER TRUMP.

"PARD, I are a stranger in town, tryin' ter see ther sights, an' ther Gov'ner o' this heur cage hev give me permit ter see ther animiles in ther misery, fer out my way, we hangs folks, an' saves ther expense o' tryin' 'em, which are considerable, as yer mout know."

The speaker was the thorough type of a prairie-man, and was in St. Louis seeing the sights, as he said.

He looked wild, and as though he might make a good fight with a grizzly in a rough and tumble, and that alone commanded a certain amount of respect for him, had it not

been enhanced by a huge gold chain, an elegant watch, diamond studs, sleeve-buttons, and an immense solitaire ring.

Certainly, sir, I will be glad to show you round the jail," replied the jailer, whom he addressed.

"Yer sha'n't regret it, pard, fer heur are a gold twenty as a keepsake from Rocky Mountain Rob, who don't knuckle to no man, and thar are more dust whar that comed from."

"Jist show me round, an' let me stir up ther animiles ter make 'em growl a leetle ter keep ther teeth from rustin', an' then, as it are my grub time, go over an' chaw wittals with me at ther hash house whar I locates."

The jailer was pleased with his new acquaintance, and readily accepted the invitation, and at once led him through the jail.

"Yer calls this a st'ut jail heur, I guesses; waal, out my way it 'd'nt hold a ten year old corpse, ef it wanted ter levan'; but then ther great immortal border kentry hain't like this town, no more'n ther people is."

"Why, pard, yer sh'u'd come out my way an' dig gold."

"I has plenty o' rocks, an' more a-diggin' an' I'll see that yer gets a fortin' ef you says go."

"Lordy! but hain't that gal badly tanned fer a pale-face?"

"That is not a pale-face, sir, but an Indian girl who murdered one of our lawyers some time ago."

"Kilt a liar, did she; waal, any man as will lie deliberate fer nuthin' will steal, an' a feller as does both, will murder ef he hain't skeert to do so, an' I guess she served him right."

"Ah no, sir; he was very good to her, and she poisoned him to marry somebody else," exclaimed the jailer.

"Ah! I sh'u'd think marryin' one man were enough; but thar are dif'rent tastes yer know, pard."

"Now what are her name?"

"Red Dove."

"Waal she are red, but I don't see ther dove, ef she were in ther p'izen bizziness."

"Is they goin' ter hang her?"

"I guess so, for she will be found guilty at her trial, and she has no friends."

"Then they'll h'ist her sart'in."

"Waal, I hev seen all I wants ter see, so come along, pard, an' we'll chaw wittals."

The strange prairie-man left the jail, accompanied by the jailer, and they had dinner together, the result of which was the following notice taken from a morning paper the second day after the visit of Rocky Mountain Rob to the jail to "stir up ther animiles," as he expressed it.

It read:

"AN ESCAPE FROM JAIL!"

"A well-laid plot!

"ROCKY MOUNTAIN ROB'S RUSE!

"The Indian Murderess Escapes!

"No Clew to the Whereabouts of the Fugitives!

"We are sorry to make known to our readers that a most daring and well-planned escape was made from the jail last night.

"The one who escaped was none other than the Indian girl known as Red Dove, who it will be remembered poisoned our lamented and highly-esteemed fellow-citizen, Mark Manning, Esquire, one of the most brilliant young lawyers of our country.

"It seems the jail was visited day before yesterday by a queer character from the West, so he said, and now known to be an accomplice of the girl.

"He called himself Rocky Mountain Rob, talked in the border dialect, was brilliant with diamonds, and spread his gold around so freely that he gained the confidence of a deputy, who was acting in the absence of the regular jailer, and the two had dinner together, the result of which was that the Indian murderer was secretly taken from the jail after midnight, and the three departed together for parts unknown.

"The deputy, to his credit be it said, released no other prisoners, but the one he was paid for, and rousing a turnkey, told him he was seriously ill and was going to see a doctor, and for him to take care of the jail.

"Whether he saw the doctor, and is feeling better, he has not returned to make known.

The detectives are scouring the country for the fugitives, but not the slightest clew to the route of their departure can be discovered.

"The earliest news we can learn regarding them, shall be promptly given our readers in an extra."

But that extra was not issued, as the three fugitives were so thoroughly disguised, through Wild Bill's well-laid plans, that they left St. Louis in broad daylight, and wended their way undetected toward the land of the setting sun.

CHAPTER XLII.

AGAIN ON THE TRAIL.

THE citizens of Poker City were surprised and delighted one noonday, some weeks

after the escape of Red Dove from St. Louis, to descry on the stage-box by the side of Andy Rush, none other than the well-known form of Wild Bill.

"He are come back," yelled an admirer.

"Pistols is trumps ag'in in this heur graveyard," shouted another.

Down sprung Wild Bill among the wild cheers of his admirers, who had begun to fear he had been lured into forgetfulness of the border, by his visit to the dazzling East.

He was looking splendidly, dressed in broad-cloth and a "b'iled shirt," as white shirts were called then, wore gloves, and one who did not know him, and who did not take a second glance into his face might have thought him a dandy.

He told the boys he had had a pleasant visit, and did not tell them what he had gone for, that he had secured Red Dove and taken her back to her people.

Nor did he explain who was his friend with him.

He was a man who attended to his own business, and people had to let his affairs alone.

The stranger, Bill's friend, was a genial fellow in his way, and several days after his arrival in town he bought out Governor Dave, who was anxious to sell out the hotel business and depart, as he said to his confidential friends, he had twice had a dream that Wild Bill had killed him, and he was determined that such a thing should not happen.

The new landlord was named Dan Dale and he rechristened the house the "Hokok Hotel," in honor of Wild Bill, whom some thought to be a silent partner.

Carrots was retained in the bar but other improvements, internal and external, were made, that caused the citizens of Poker City to feel proud of their new acquisition of Wild Bill's friend, and who, I do not suppose it is necessary to inform the reader, was the absconding deputy who had aided in the masterly exit of Red Dove from durance vile, and was able to "set up in business," for himself with his little fee received on that occasion.

After a visit to his ranch, where he was welcomed by his three cowboys, and the remark from Bricktop that:

"Yer looks as fine as a circulatin' parson on a Sunday mornin'," Wild Bill mounted Midnight and alone set forth on a trail.

An early Spring had come, the snows were melting in the mountains, and he stated he thought he would enjoy a hunt in the mountains.

That hunt was to pick up the threads of the lost trail, and ferret out the mystery over-hanging Edna Insley's departure on that night of storm the month before.

With Midnight in splendid condition, himself feeling in good spirits and fully recovered from his wounds, thoroughly armed, and with a large hound, he had brought with him from the East, trotting at the heels of his horse, Wild Bill rode out of Poker City one pleasant morning and headed straight into the mountain fastnesses.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TRACKED TO DOOM.

THE chief, whose sudden arrival in the midst of storm, had been announced to Edna Insley by the Indian Snake-with-wings, and whose coming had brought from her lips a cry of surprise was none other than Old Buckskin himself.

That lone hut in the canyon was his principal retreat in those wild mountains, and his housekeepers were the Indian and the lion.

He had other cabins scattered here and there, in the most inaccessible places, one of which the reader will remember as the abiding-place of Mark Manning for several days, when lying in wait to get poor Red Dove into his power, and thus secure her fortune through cunning and treachery, deceiving even Wild Bill with his cat-like appearance of honesty of purpose.

But, as he sowed, he reaped, and the harvest was death for him at the hands of the one he had wronged.

The other cabins of Old Buckskin were merely temporary abiding-places, scattered here and there; but the one in which Edna found herself was his home.

True to his instincts in prairie and mountain craft, he had been heading for the cabin, in spite of his occasional getting off the trail in the storm, and, unable to find Edna, and feeling that she had been dashed down the cliff to her death, he had continued on his way,

reached the pass at the head of the deep canyon and arrived an hour after she did.

"Well! this is a glad surprise," she said as he entered.

"Yas, it are a gladder one ter me, fer I thought sartin yer were dead, when yer went over that cliff, an' it can't be did ag'in an' not kill yer, an' so I comed on ter my leetle ranch, detarmined ter dig yer out o' ther snow termorrer an' give yer decent burryin'."

"But you took ther short cut an' beat heur; durned ef yer didn't."

"So it seems, and I found this warm fire most welcome."

"Yas, I guess yer found ther fire more warmer in welcomin' yer then that Injun an' pant'er, fer they is surley brutes both of 'em, but they suits me."

"I saved that Injun from gittin' burnt up at ther stake some years ago, an' he hev freezed ter me ever since, an' ther lion I r'ized from a purp, an' I gnesses, 'ceptin' my horse, them is all that loves Old Buckskin."

"You must certainly count me as one of your friends."

"Waal, we'll see."

"Now I'll just rumage round an' make this shanty comfortable fer yer ter-night, an' ther Injun, ther pant'er an' me will go ter other lodgins; but I'll be on han' for breakfast with yer."

Utterly worn out, with the feeling of shelter and warmth, Edna sunk into a deep sleep from which she was only awakened by Old Buckskin calling to her that it was time for breakfast.

She dressed herself hurriedly, glanced out, and saw that the storm had cleared away, and the sun was shining.

A good breakfast awaited her, and she had no cause to complain of Snake-with-wings as a cook, whatever his other faults might be, and she ate heartily.

"Now jist come with me, leddy, an' I'll give yer a surprise party," said the old hunter.

To her surprise, he caught hold of the cupboard against the back of the cabin, and it swung out like a door, revealing a cavern behind it.

Taking a pine knot and lighting it, he led her through this cave, which grew larger as they went along, and she started with horror to suddenly come upon an arched chamber of rock, and behold before her, lying upon a cot, and chained to the wall, a man with haggard face, emaciated form and gray hair and beard.

But in spite of the surroundings, the appearance of the poor wretch, and the story told her that he was dead, Edna Insley recognized the father she had not seen for years.

"Great God! you here, my poor, dear father," and she sprung to his side.

"My child! my child! you have come to save me," was all the poor man could utter, and the two were clasped in each other's arms.

Suddenly they were recalled to themselves by a stern voice saying:

"Well, now that I have you both in my power, I guess I can bring you to terms, Anson Insley."

They turned toward the speaker. It was Old Buckskin.

He stood a few paces apart gazing upon them, with a strange expression upon his face.

The man was crouching down against the wall of the cave, to which his irons were attached, and seemed but a wreck of manhood.

He gazed upon his beautiful daughter, and clung to her hand tremblingly, as though he feared to lose her.

She looked upon Old Buckskin with an expression of intense surprise.

Not for a moment before had a shadow of doubt of the guide found a place in her heart.

Now, when she saw her father in irons, and heard the remark of the man, whose retreat she knew it was, she gasped:

"What do you mean?"

"I will tell you what I mean, Miss Edna Insley, and the story is soon told."

Old Buckskin had suddenly dropped his dialect, and drawing himself up to his full height confronted the father and daughter.

"An explanation of your words and conduct are certainly necessary, and both my poor father and myself will listen to what you have to say," said Edna haughtily.

"You assume a tone, my lady, by no means in keeping with your position at present," replied Old Buckskin.

"Ah! I see, you are as treacherous as a

snake, and have gotten me into your power, you think."

"I know it."

"We shall see, sir; but who are you?"

"Old Buckskin the guide."

"No, that is evidently a name you are dodging justice under."

"I ask who you are, and why you have suddenly turned against me, as your words and manner indicate?"

"Let me explain."

"That man, your father, is my life-long enemy."

"Then you are the one that has placed him here in irons?"

"I am."

"How has he wronged you?"

"Basely."

"You know you speak falsely, for I have done you no wrong," said the chained man.

"It was no wrong to defraud me of my fortune, Anson Insley?"

"I did not defraud you of it, for your conduct turned your father's heart against you, and he willed it to me."

"I was wild, I admit, and extravagant."

"You were slow-going, and your quiet ways made you a favorite with my father."

"I needed money, Anson Insley, and though you were the cashier, and could have let me have it, you refused."

"I had loaned you all I could spare you from my own savings."

"Curse your savings; I wanted more than you could save in years, and you refused me."

"I did my duty to my uncle, whose cashier I was."

"And I, his son, you would not help out of a scrape."

"I could not."

"So you said; well, Miss Edna Insley, let me tell you that I had a debt to pay, and if it was not promptly paid, it would have been discovered that I had committed a forgery."

"A forgery?"

"Oh, yes, I don't mind telling you now; but I was driven to it."

"As your father refused me the money I needed, I determined to take it from the safe."

"I watched him open it several times, and discovered the combination lock."

"That night I went into the office with a false key, opened the safe, and got out a roll of bills."

"Your father and my father were returning home together from a lecture, and saw me go up the alley to the back door."

"My father went after an officer, while that man, Anson Insley, followed me."

"He found the door unlocked and came in, and met me coming out of the office."

"He sprung upon me, not knowing me, for I was disguised, and, when I saw he was going to get the best of me, as an act of self-preservation, I drove a knife into his side."

"At the door I was caught by the officer and my father, who recognized me."

"Go! go with what you have stolen, and never darken my door again or call yourself my son."

"Such were the words of my father to me, and taking him at his word, I departed, for he bribed the officer to let me go."

"Since that day I never saw my father, for he died some years after, but your father, as you see, I have met since," and the man smiled in a sinister, sneering way that caused Edna to shudder.

But her father, with bowed head, neither moved or showed signs of having heard the man's recital of his acts of guilt.

CHAPTER XLIV.

UNDER FALSE COLORS.

"ARE you interested sufficiently in my confession, and explanation of why you find your father here in chains, to wish to hear more?" asked Old Buckskin, after a pause.

"Yes."

"Well, the wound I gave your father that night well-nigh proved fatal: but he had a hardy constitution and survived it."

"I came West and went into the cattle business in a pleasant valley a hundred miles or so from here, and I would have succeeded well but for some little acts I committed that rendered me an object of attention from the Vigilantes."

"Of those irregularities, according to law, I need not speak, as they do not concern you."

"But while I was drifting about the border, as adventurer, guide, scout, and lastly as ren-

egade, your father was playing his cards so well that my father left him his fortune."

"I was cut off with just enough to bury me, and my cousin got the riches that should have been mine."

"You are aware that in some way he swamped himself, and rather than see his wife and child live in poverty, he came West to dig gold out of the mines."

"By a strange accident I managed to save his life, and he was drawn toward me by the warmest gratitude, though under my border name he did not know me, and, in fact, the many years that had passed since we met had changed me from the ruddy faced youth of eighteen, which I was then, to the man of forty, with long hair and beard."

"But I knew him at a glance, even though he was going under his Christian name of Anson Boyd, instead of Anson B. Insley, for he did not seem to wish people to know that the one time man of wealth had turned miner."

"Well, we stuck together, and went as partners out here."

He already had dug out considerable gold, but my luck was not equal.

"Perhaps I was too lazy."

"Business called me away for a few weeks, and in my absence your father had made a big find, and with all his diggings intended to go soon to the nearest station, and return for his gold with wagons and a guard."

"In my absence he had hidden it somewhere, and where he would not tell me, as some miners had given him cause to doubt me."

"I told him I would help him, and he said no, and offered me a thousand or so, as my luck had been bad."

"His thousand I did not want, but his thousands I did, and I determined to possess all."

"He started for the nearest station alone; but I had already laid my plans, and with an Indian comrade I waylaid him on the road, and threatened him with death if he would not tell the secret of where he had buried his gold."

"This he refused to do, and I brought him here, and here he has been ever since, and will remain until he tells the secret to me, for that gold I am determined to have."

"I do not doubt it."

"You are, then, his comrade of whom he wrote such kind letters?" said Edna.

"Yes."

"You are, then—"

"Prince Harry, I called myself then."

"And Henry Hammond, who came to my mother and myself with the story of my father's death?"

"Yes."

"What motive had you for coming to see us?"

"I knew he had sent considerable money to you, and I wished to see just how much."

"And yet you brought us gold?"

"A little, which I said had been left by your father."

"That was a blind, simply to make myself solid, you know."

"Well, sir, you found out we were not rich?"

"I found out that I loved my sweet cousin, in my way, and I wanted to marry you."

"Had I succeeded, I would have returned here, told your father you were my wife, and given him his liberty, in case he should swear by the most sacred oaths that he would not betray me."

"Then, I would see that he made his will in your favor, and his death would have been a matter of very short time after that."

"Oh! you villain!" cried Edna, with intense indignation.

"I know it, sweet cousin; but my clever foot was revealed to you, and I spoiled my prospects, so returned West, to try and force from your father where his gold was hidden."

"This he refused to do, saying he would rather die, and you see he is dying on account of his stubbornness."

"If he dies he shall be fearfully avenged," said Edna, with savage earnestness.

"You are in no position to threaten."

"We shall see."

"Yes, we shall see, sweet cousin."

"It was a lucky day when I found you had arrived in Poker City, and I at once determined to get possession of you."

"And you have succeeded."

"Certainly; I play to win, and hold as many trump cards as that terrible fellow Wild Bill."

"You'll find that he'll win the game when it

comes to a play of life and death between you."

"I'll risk it, for Satan takes care of his own, and I can find no fault with him for not caring for me."

"Well, sir, what is your intention now with regard to my poor father and myself?" and Edna glanced straight into the face of the man before her.

"To get your father's gold, and make you Mrs. Henry Hammond," was the unblushing remark of the man, as he drew from his head a most cleverly made wig and beard, revealing the countenance of the man whom poor Mrs. Insley had dreamt that she saw killing her husband.

In point of fact that dream was true, for the man was indeed ending the life of Anson Insley inch by inch, keeping him chained like a dog in that loathsome cavern.

CHAPTER XLV.

A VILLAIN'S TERMS.

FOR a moment after his terrible threat of what was his diabolical intention, Edna Insley stood like a statue gazing upon the dark, handsome, but sinister and cruel face of the man before her.

Her father had seemed to awaken from his lethargy, and half rose to his feet, to sink again upon his bear-skin, with a groan that seemed to come from his inmost being.

"You dare make such an assertion to me, sir?" at last said Edna, with trembling voice and flashing eyes.

"Why not?"

"You ask why not?"

"Yes."

"I marry such as you are?" and her scorn was fearful.

"You certainly shall."

"Never!"

"You forget you are in my power."

"Oh, no! I could not forget that with your devilish face confronting me."

"Here! be warned not to insult, or you may rue your words."

"You will not harm me."

"You need not be too certain."

"Why you said you loved me."

"I do."

"God help such love."

"It is true love, and I would make you my wife, and become a changed man, led by your influence, for I would have gold, and it is the desire to get riches that makes me the wicked man I am."

"You know your wickedness then?"

"Of course, and do not deny it, so I woo you under no false pretenses."

"You have kept my poor father here a chained prisoner, trying to wring the secret of where he had hidden his gold from him, and yet he has had the nerve to remain firm to thwart you, and I am his child, so you need not think I will yield."

"I will kill him if he does not tell."

"Oh no."

"I say I will."

"And I say oh no."

"You shall see."

"No, you are cowardly enough, I admit, but then you bury the secret with him, and thus thwart yourself."

"I mean I shall yet have his gold, and make you my wife."

"And I mean, that you shall neither get the gold, or marry me."

"Amen!"

The word was spoken in a deep voice, and it was the chained prisoner who uttered it.

"Well, I'll tell you my terms."

"The terms of an arrant villain."

"Be careful."

"A murderer, a renegade, ay, and all that is bad."

"You had better be warned, Edna Insley, or you'll regret it."

"I can regret nothing so much as having known you."

"You shall know me better."

"Your terms, please, Sir Villain, and then leave us."

"Well, the fortune and your hand in marriage."

"Never!"

"I say yes, for then I will set your father at liberty, and we will seek other lands and live in happiness."

"Never!"

"Think."

"No, I will not think."

"Then here you both remain and die," he said savagely.

"So be it, we will die."

"Well, you know my terms, and if you agree to them, just come to the cabin and rap, and I will hear you."

"I shall bring you a cot and make you as comfortable as I can; but through the cabin is the only means of egress from this cavern, and you see escape is impossible."

"Yonder light streams through crevices, so you will have air, and not be in the dark, and the Indian will give you your food regularly."

"Now I leave you to think over my terms."

The next moment he was gone, and Edna Insley was alone with her father, whom she had so strangely found, and found a mere wreck of his former self.

CHAPTER XLVI.

FIGHTING FATE.

"OH FATHER! what have we done that all this sorrow should come upon us?"

The cry came from poor Edna when the presence of the man, known as Old Buckskin, no longer prevented her from an exhibition of her feelings.

For an instant she seemed utterly crushed under the blow, and her brave nature yielded to weakness.

But, when she gazed upon the tortured face of her father, and saw that in his weak state he too was about to yield, after the long time of resolute defiance he had maintained, she at once controlled her emotion.

She saw that the strong man would break down now, and now was when both needed all their strength, for not for a moment did the maiden think of yielding to the demand of the villain who had brought so much sorrow upon them.

"Edna, my child, we are but as reeds in his hands."

"I will confess the secret of where my treasure is buried, and let him have all, if only he will allow you and I to go in peace."

"We will be poor, but I will work again for your support, my noble child."

"Call him, Edna, and tell him I will confess and that he shall have the gold."

The appearance of the man was pitiable as he spoke; but the same resolute will that had upheld him through starvation, imprisonment, and the iron chains eating into his flesh, now shone forth in the face of his daughter.

"No, father, not one dollar shall he have, and he shall never make me his wife."

"But, my child—"

"Father, for two years you have held out against that devil in human shape, and now that I am with you, you can recuperate, and I will not mind the imprisonment."

"I am young and strong, and have a spirit not readily broken."

"He will not iron me, for he thinks a woman can do nothing to escape from his power."

"But he shall see, so cheer up, my dear father, and we will see what can be done."

Her firm resolve gave renewed life to him, and the two sat down for an earnest talk together.

Then she made inquiries of all he knew about the cavern, and asked regarding there being no other outlet, except through the cabin.

"Edna," suddenly cried the imprisoned man eagerly:

"There must be, there is, another outlet, and I will tell you why I think, or rather know so."

"One day that villainous panther was left to watch me, when the Indian left the cabin, and, getting tired of his work, I saw him go off to the left of yonder bend, and in an hour's time he returned with a large mountain-rabbit in his mouth, which he laid down there and ate."

"Then there is an opening?" eagerly said Edna.

"Yes, for that rabbit either came in, or the panther went out and caught it."

"Oh! if I could but find it; but then it might be too small for us to get out."

"No, for one night I was awakened by a growl, and saw two bright objects over there against the wall, looking at me."

"The fire had burned low, and at first I thought it was the lion; but then another growl came, and I felt sure it was a wild animal."

"I reached over and stirred up the embers, and distinctly saw the savage beast run away, and it was, I think, a bear."

"That settles the question of an outlet, father."

"But did you tell that man, or the Indian about your seeing the animal?"

"No, though I felt it would be safer to do so; as some night it might return and spring upon me in my sleep."

"I asked for some wood at night, to keep the fire burning; but they immediately deprived me of all they had before allowed me, and nightly I have been in fear of being torn in pieces by wild beasts."

"Oh! what have you not suffered my poor father."

"Untold agonies, my child, and I believe I should have gone mad, but for your timely coming."

"But see, I tried to file my chain in two, by rubbing those links against the rocks."

"See!"

He held forth the chains, near where they were driven into the rocks, and showed that two links had been worn very thin.

"This would necessitate your carrying the weight of three feet on either wrist, father."

"I should have thought you would have tried to free the manacles upon your wrists."

"Oh no! they are daily inspected by the Indian, and it would have been seen that I was tampering with them."

"That is the right place, and they would act as dangerous weapons, in case I had been attacked."

"But my strength gave out, and I could do no more, and had almost given myself up to die."

"Yet I should have died with the secret burial-place of my treasure untold, for that man should never have had it."

"Well, father, cheer up now, and ere long I feel that all will be well."

"We will fight fate to the bitter end, and triumph at last."

"As soon as night comes on, and we are left alone, I shall inspect this cavern thoroughly, for I have a couple of boxes of matches in my pocket, which I fortunately forgot to put in my satchel at our last halting-place, and merely discovered as I was about to mount."

"Cheer up, father, for I see light ahead, and we will yet outwit that man, and then—"

She paused, and her father asked:

"What were you about to say, my child?"

"Then we will find out just how sweet revenge is," and her voice was cold and bitter as she spoke, for the plight of her father made her indeed most revengeful.

CHAPTER XLVII.

HOPE AND DESPAIR.

THOUGH Henry Hammond, as he was known to Edna, had certainly had experience sufficient with the maiden, to know that she possessed pluck and endurance far above the average, he yet felt so secure in the strength of his stronghold prison, as not to take any measures, other than having himself, Snake-with-wings, or Ugly, the lion, constantly in the cavern, to bar against mistake.

A few bear-skins and buffalo-robés were brought and spread on the cavern floor, a cot was put in a niche for her, and both her father and herself were made more comfortable, yet were given to understand that they never left that loathsome retreat alive, unless they yielded to the terms of their keeper.

Fortunately Edna was not ironed, and as soon as she felt that all was quiet in the cabin, she started upon her voyage of discovery.

A pine torch, lighted at the fire, which was another comfort their foe allowed them, served to give her light upon her explorations.

She found that the cavern branched off from the rotunda, where her father was confined, into several different tunnels, and these she determined to take in regular order.

She began with the one on the left and followed it until she had to stoop.

Then she crawled upon her hands and knees until it ended.

Retracing her way she entered the second tunnel and traced this to its termination, and with like result, for it had no egress that even a rat could escape through.

Utterly tired out with her work, which had consumed several hours, she returned and reported her want of success thus far to her father, and added cheerily:

"Never mind, I will yet find the outlet."

Going to her skin-covered cot, she sunk to sleep, and was only awakened by her father

calling her when the sunlight was streaming through the crevices in the vaulted roof.

The day passed, with the three visits of the Indian, bringing their meals, and one visit from Ugly, the panther, who, after a calm survey of the two prisoners turned and walked away with an angry growl, as though he feared their presence was curtailing his daily allowance of rations.

With night Edna bravely started again upon her explorations, while her father, with renewed strength, for the coming of his daughter had brought his appetite back to him, devoted his time in again rubbing his chain links against the rocks to wear them through.

The third cavern was then explored to the end, and once more Edna returned to the large rock-chamber disappointed.

The fourth she followed until she saw that she could go no further.

The end she had not reached, and the opening that extended on was barely large enough to admit a cat.

"The rabbit might have come in there; but not the bear," she muttered, as she retraced her way to make her report to the father, for she dared not lose rest in prosecuting her search further that night.

Another day passed away, with the customary visits of the Indian with food, but none from Ugly, or his equally brutish master, whom the red-skin said, in answer to Edna's question, had not gone away from the cabin.

The third night the hopeful girl started on her work once more, and, as the fifth cave extended so much further into the mountain, and was so winding, she only had time to explore it that night, and have the same report of want of success to make to the now hopeful man, for he had regained hope by the coming of his daughter only, and improved in strength and looks greatly each day.

The fourth night she found the fifth tunnel larger than the others, and went to its very end without stooping.

But the most careful search failed to show the slightest outlet.

Two more caverns yet remained to be explored, and after the same routine of visits from the Indian, and unbroken rest at night, she began upon the sixth.

As in the latter it was large, and at the end, where she was able to stand upright, she beheld a crevice in the rocks, through which the cold air came in a draught that blew out her torch.

For a moment, in the darkness, she was almost unnerved.

But controlling her emotion she felt her way back, and though it seemed an age to her, at last came in view the glimmering firelight near her father's cot.

"Oh, father!" she cried, and sunk down upon her bed.

But when she saw how he was moved by her emotion she rallied and told him of the blowing out of her torch, and her long hunt in the darkness to find her way back to him.

"One more tunnel remains, father, and Heaven grant that be the one," she said.

"It must be, for it is the last, and it ever seems when we search for anything it is the last thing we find."

"Have hope, my child, for that one must be the one through which the bear came."

And she did have hope, and with a buoyant heart started on the exploration of the seventh and last tunnel.

She discovered the end, as she at first thought, but, on closer examination, found there an opening about the size of a barrel.

Through this she crawled, and again stood upright.

The new cavern which she had invaded was quite large at the place she had entered, but ran off in horn shape before her.

Forward she went, after lighting another pine torch she had brought with her to guard against accidents, and soon reached the end of the cavern.

There was a small opening there, like a narrow door, and through this she went, and then there seemed no further progress to be made.

She held her torch above her head, when there came a savage growl, the piece of blazing pine was knocked from her hand and fell upon the rocky floor, and was extinguished by the shock.

Then there was a scratching sound heard, as of claws upon rock, and silence followed.

In terror and despair she sank in her tracks with a low moan, and became unconscious.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

WHAT THE DARKNESS REVEALED.

How long Edna Insley lay in that dark cavern unconscious she never knew, but when at last she revived she was chilled through, and it took her some moments to collect her scattered thoughts and remember what had happened and where she was.

At last the terrible growl, the spring of the wild beast over her head, knocking the upraised torch from her hand, came back to her in all its vividness and horror.

With the terror she felt came also the joy of knowing that the cavern must have an outlet, yet how did the savage beast enter?

As she glanced around her, yet hardly with the hope of seeing anything in that impenetrable gloom, she suddenly observed a glimmer like a mere spark.

Peering forward she soon saw that it was a star, visible through a crevice in the rocks.

She moved her position, and a cry of joy escaped her as she caught sight of many stars, and feeling in front of her she found a kind of rocky shelf, rising to the height of her face.

Before her was an opening large enough to pass through with ease.

She cared to see no more, for the last of the seven tunnels had been the one she was in search of.

Fortunately she had matches with her, and lighting several, she found her pine torch, and soon had it relit.

Then she discovered why the tunnel exit had not been discovered by the renegade and the Indian, as standing a few feet away, the fissure in the rock leading to the second cavern was not visible, and they had evidently, in their search, not been as thorough as she was.

Back through the rocky hallway she went, and soon stood in the presence of her father, who was becoming alarmed by her long absence.

"Father, I have found it!" she cried.

"The cutlet, child?"

"Yes."

"Thank God! Then we are saved!" he said, fervently.

"Yes, father, we will soon leave this spot, as soon as your irons are freed from the rock."

"See, Edna!"

He held up the iron chains as he spoke.

"Free, thank Heaven!"

"Yes, and see, I can unite them again by bending the worn links ever so little."

He suited the action to the word, and seemed again securely bound.

"Leave them so, father, and let us seek rest, for I am very tired."

"Yes, and to morrow—"

"To-morrow night, father, we will leave this hateful place."

"But we will need food, my child."

"I have saved something from each meal, and have quite a supply hidden away."

"I will ask to-morrow for my wraps and satchel, and if they are given me, I have hopes of finding something we will greatly need."

"What is it, Edna?"

"It depends upon how far the curiosity of that man has caused him to look through my traps."

"If he made a thorough search, it will not be there."

"What is it, child?"

"A revolver?"

"You with a pistol, child?"

"Yes, and a good shot, too, as Henry Hammond shall find out if he pursues us."

"You call him Harry Hammond, Edna?"

"That is the name he bore when he came to see us."

"It is not his right name."

"To you, as your mining comrade, he was known as Prince Harry."

"Yes, but he has a number of aliases, it seems."

"One of which is Old Buckskin, and I must confess his disguise of an old hunter is something wonderful, father."

"Ah, yes, he is a clever dog, my child."

"But the name he claims of Henry Hammond was his father's, it being Henry Hammond Harcourt, while his is Hugh Harcourt."

And that name doubtless carries the reader far back to the lover of poor Lou Loring, the belle of the settlement of Valley Farms, and who sacrificed herself as the wife of Black Bear, to save others from ruin and death.

CHAPTER XLIX.

DARED BY DEATH.

THE following morning when Snake-with-wings put in an appearance with the breakfast of the surprised father and daughter, Edna said to him:

"Does your renegade master refuse me my sachel and wraps?"

"Snake-with-wings ask chief," was the uncompromising response of the Indian.

He now returned from the cabin, bringing with him the wraps and sachel, with the remark:

"White chief good man, treat pale-face squaw much good."

"He is worse than that savage brute at your heels," said Edna, indignantly, pointing to Ugly, who had followed the Indian back as though to see what the fair prisoner could want with her luggage.

The Indian made no reply and departed, Ugly following him, and Edna proceeded to examine her sachel.

At a glance she saw that it had been tampered with.

But for this she did not care, seeming only to feel anxious about one thing it contained.

"Thank God!"

The cry broke fervently from her lips.

"Well, my child?" eagerly asked her father.

"See, sir, I had this sachel made to carry my little traps, trinkets and combs and brushes."

"Under this pouch for the brushes is a secret receptacle for my money, and even the lynx eyes of that man Hammond—"

"Hugh Harcourt, my child."

"Yes; even that man, Hugh Harcourt has not found out the secret, for here, sir, see, I have my money safe, but better than all this, a revolver, which is small, but serviceable, and being very valuable, I put in here, as I won it at a shooting-match, and it is gold-mounted and my name in diamonds is set in the stock."

She raised, with a touch on the spring, the steel rim of the sachel, displaying another opening, which formed a false bottom to the bag, and in this was her money and the prized revolver.

She handed the weapon to her father, who examined it critically, and said:

"Thirty-two caliber, and all six barrels loaded."

"Yes, and but three enemies to subdue, father," said Edna, in a low tone.

"Sh, child! We will leave by the secret entrance in this cavern."

That day seemed to them a month in passing away.

But after long waiting the daylight faded away from through the crevices in the vaulted roof, and Snake-with-wings came with their supper.

They ate but little, for both were too anxious to enjoy the meal.

But what they left Edna hid away, and the Indian gave a grunt, when he came after the dishes, to see that nothing was left for him or the panther.

As soon as he was gone Edna began preparations for their departure.

First, she packed all of their food in a bag she had made of a blanket.

Then she got her father to draw on the bear-skin shoes she had made for him, and the wraps were divided between them.

"Now come, father," she said, in a whisper.

He drew the worn links apart, and arose, a man free from his chains.

Then he took up the little bundle of pine torches the maiden had tied together, and with one lighted, to show them the way, they departed.

Into the cavern-way, in the end of which Edna had found the outlet, they went, and ere long came to the termination of the rock-bound passageway.

Into the outer opening they went, and again was heard that savage growl, and instantly before them appeared a panther, his eyes gleaming upon them, as he crouched for the spring upon the maiden, who was in advance, her father being behind with the torch.

Even at that fateful moment Edna Insley did not lose her presence of mind, and a flash and report followed the growl in a second.

There was a howl of rage, and the panther fell at her very feet, the bullet having pierced his eye.

"Come, father, for that will be heard, and we will be pursued," she cried eagerly.

He sprung to her side, and they beheld, by the torchlight, that above their heads was a

shelf of rock, which was the flooring of a small cave, from whence had bounded the frightened animal, which had knocked Edna's light from her hand the night before.

On a level, nearly, with that, and some five feet away, was the outlet of the cavern.

With the aid of her father she clambered upon the rock, and she helped to draw him up after her.

Then the two stepped out of the cavern into the open air.

But from the lips of both broke a cry of almost despair.

And no wonder, at the sight which was spread before them.

It was late, and the moon was just rising, and its silvery light fell upon a field of mossy white before them, covering valley and mountain.

"Oh, father! I forgot about the snow-storm," cried Edna, feeling faint with the discovery.

"Alas! yes, my child, neither of us thought of that in our eagerness to escape."

"But can we not push ahead father, be it ever so little each day?" urged Edna.

"My child, that snow lies two feet deep, and with no guide through its white wastes, we would be daring death."

"Why, we could not travel a mile through it."

"But what can we do?"

"Return."

"Return to that prison, father?"

"Yes, child."

"To die?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Await until spring, when the snow is gone."

"Await! Oh! it is so long! so long!"

"I have waited these two years, my child."

"Forgive me, father. We will return and wait, if—"

"Well, Edna?"

"If the shov has not already alarmed those wretches."

"We will soon know; but let me get back into the cavern and throw the dead panther out."

"That was as dead a shot, my brave girl, as the famous Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot, could have made."

"It was life or death, father, and I am firm in danger."

"You are indeed, my noble girl."

Mr. Insley then got back into the cavern, and the body of the panther was thrown outside, and the two slowly retraced their way to their cots.

No sound was heard by them to show that the shot had reached even the acute hearing of the lion and Indian, and with bitterness in their hearts at their failure, they hid their bundles, Mr. Insley fastened his chains together again, and they lay down upon their cots.

The man soon fell asleep, for his long imprisonment had made him stoical.

But Edna lay awake for a long time, and in her heart was a resolve that the spring should never find them in that loathsome den.

Death had dared them to face that waste of snow; but Life would dare her to face Death to escape.

CHAPTER L.

EDNA'S BLOW FOR LIBERTY.

WHEN the morning broke, after the unsuccessful attempt of the forlorn captives to escape, it found them very blue.

Seeing that his daughter seemed almost crushed by their failure, Mr. Insley endeavored to cheer her.

He told her that their death would have followed quickly had they gone forth in that snow, and that in four months, perhaps, they might be able to make the attempt with every prospect of success.

"Four months! it is an age, father."

"Not so long as you think, my child."

"We are certainly not uncomfortable here, and that red-skin gives us good food, which I certainly have an appetite for, now that I have you to share my meals with me."

"We have comfortable cots, the air here is not bad, for the draught through the cavern keeps it pure, and as we have so much to tell each other and plot over for our plans in the future, we will soon talk the time away."

"I am glad to see you cheer up so, father."

"As for myself, I can stand the delay, only it seemed so hard that you should have to remain months longer."

"The very reason that I have suffered so long, is why I care less for the time, my child."

And thus they chatted on through the day, and worn out by their loss of sleep the previous night, they laid down to rest sooner than was their wont.

An hour, two hours passed, and then Edna raised up in her cot, and, by the low glimmer of the embers glanced over to her father's bed.

His regular breathing told her that he was asleep.

Gently she arose, drew on her shoes and folded a wrap about her. Cautiously she crept away from the spot, yet not in the direction in which she had gone before.

This time she took the rocky passageway leading to the cabin.

As noiselessly as the mountain lion could have gone, she went, until at last, by feeling, she felt that she was at the back of the cabin.

She had noticed, as she came through, that the pantry against the log wall, hid the leather hinges of the door, as well as the opening, and none would have suspected that behind it was the entrance to a large cavern, so cleverly had the opening been concealed.

She had also observed, that to open it, Hugh Harcourt, had merely to pull upon the wooden cupboard, or pantry.

If that pull opened the secret door from the inside of the cabin, a push must certainly, from the cave side, throw it open.

She shoved lightly against it, yet it did not move.

She pushed further, and felt it give.

Then she paused.

She heard the breathing of one person within the cabin.

Yet there must be Hugh Harcourt, the Indian and the panther.

She shoved harder against the door and it opened wide enough for her to see within.

A cot bed was visible in one corner, yet no one was asleep upon it, as she could see by the firelight from the hearth.

Yet the breathing of a sleeper she distinctly heard.

Hugh Harcourt had given up to her, the night she passed in the cabin, his cot, he had told her, while he, the Indian and the panther, had slept in the adjoining hut.

Where then was the occupant of that cot?

Could he be absent?

True, she had not seen him since the day he had left the cavern, after making known his terms, and he might have returned to Poker City, confident in the inability of her father and herself to escape, with the watchful eyes of the Indian and panther upon them.

Without she heard the wind howling, and that perhaps drowned any noise she might have made in opening the secret door.

Unfortunately it opened in such a way she could not see where the sleeper was who breathed so heavily, and if there was any one else in the room.

The panther, too, she felt she must keep an eye upon.

But she had come there to see just what kind of watch was kept, and just what the chances of escape were.

She felt that she must see who that sleeper was, and gently she opened the door further.

There were no iron hinges to give an unearthly creak, and not the slightest sound did she make.

With her revolver in hand, and cocked, to be ready for any emergency, she pushed the secret door far enough open to put her head through the crack and look around toward the fire.

Her eyes fell upon a human form lying before the fire upon a buffalo-robe, and covered with another, and then, quick as a flash she beheld the crouching body, and head erect of the panther.

He saw her as quickly as she discovered that he was alert, and he made his spring.

But she had a nerve of iron, and her finger touched the trigger, and with the report the beast fell and rolled over.

But up sprung the sleeping man, and against him the revolver was turned, and he sunk back to his knees wounded.

Again the weapon flashed, and this time the man fell dead.

But the panther was not yet slain, and with a bound he was upon her, his weight hurling

her to the ground, and his teeth were buried in her arms.

But still Edna Insley lost not her nerve and once, twice her revolver rung through the cabin, and echoed back in the cavern, and the muzzle was against the hairy hide of the savage beast.

Instantly he relaxed his grip upon her arms, and in her ears rung the clanking of chains, and into the cabin sprung her father. Then she knew no more.

CHAPTER LI.

HOLDING THE FORT.

WHEN Edna Insley recovered her senses, she was lying upon the cot in the corner of the cabin, and her father was bending over her with anxious face.

"Thank God, my child, you have revived."

"I feared you were fatally hurt," said Anson Insley fervently.

The rattle of the chains clinging to his wrists caused her to start up suddenly, and one sweeping glance around the cabin told her all.

"Oh, father! I fear I was a great coward to faint as I did," she cried.

"Ah, no, my child, for you went through enough to drive you mad."

"See, there lies the Indian you killed, and here is the panther, and he was dead across your form, his teeth fastened in your soft flesh, when I found you."

"But come, let me look to the wound his teeth have made, and then we will see what is best to be done."

"But where is Harcourt?"

"I have not seen him."

"Then he must be away, for the door is fastened from within."

She advanced toward the fire, at first totteringly, and then her father dressed the cruel, ugly wound the brute's teeth had made in her beautiful arm.

Mr. Insley was no mean surgeon, and he soon had the arm well dressed, and drew the cot up nearer to the fire for Edna to recline upon.

"Now to remove these ghastly tributes to your pluck and deadly aim, Edna, and I think they had better go out through the end of the cavern, where we threw the panther you killed last night."

He took up a piece of pine as he spoke, lighted it, and seizing the Indian dragged him into the cavern, for his strength had not sufficiently returned for him to carry him.

He was gone for some little while, and then returned for the panther, and he too made his exit through the other end of the cavern, a secret that seemed only known to the brute dweller in the cabin.

When he returned, Anson Insley brought back with him the wraps and satchel of his daughter, and there was that in his face which showed her he had resolved to be a free man.

"Well, my child, we will make ourselves as comfortable as possible, and hold this fort against all comers," he said in a cheery tone.

"We will hardly have more than one visitor, father."

"He shall find us ready to receive him, Edna," was the laconic reply.

"Now to get these chains off," and he searched around for some instrument, with which he could free himself of his loathsome bonds.

A file he could not find, nor a key to fit the locks on the manacles; but he discovered a piece of stout wire and this was made to serve duty to try and pick the locks.

"But they had become rusted by long disuse and would not turn."

In vain he searched for something with which to free himself, for he could find nothing to aid him.

The irons round the wrist were very thick and wide, and could not be rubbed in two in a year.

To rub the links loose would take a long time, and he at once decided to bear the ill he had, as he was certainly free, and, holding the cabin, with the arms inside, he could certainly meet Hugh Harcourt upon his return as man to man.

The two ends of the chains were accordingly tied together and then throwing them over his neck and shoulders, he said philosophically:

"Well, Edna, in this shape they are more of an ornament than otherwise, and will not retard me in the use of my arms."

Seeing that the door was closed securely,

Anson Insley then retired to rest, and the day had dawned when he awoke.

Out of the cabin he looked, to find how heavy had been the fall of snow.

There was no trail leading away from the cabin, and he knew that Hugh Harcourt must have gone away before the last snow-storm and was prevented from returning by its severity.

To leave that cabin then, even well mounted, without a thorough knowledge of the country, or a guide, he well knew would be madness.

"No, here we must remain until the Spring," he muttered.

Then he went to the adjoining cabin, and unbarred the door.

There were two horses within, one of them being Wonder, Edna's splendid animal.

The cabin was larger than the other, and was filled, excepting the space for horses, with dried prairie-grass for provender.

A tiny spring bubbled up in one corner, so there was at least food and water for the animals.

To the walls of the cabin also hung carcasses of cured game, from buffalo haunches to wild turkeys.

"So far good: there is food enough, such as it is, for the horses, and we cannot starve.

"Snake-with-wings was certainly a good provider.

"Now I'll go back and see how my noble girl is."

So saying, he threw the horses some hay, watered them, and returned to the cabin, through the knee-deep snow.

Edna still lay upon the cot, but was restless, and gazing at her, to his dread, Anson Insley found that she was awake, and was burning with fever.

He spoke to her, and she answered incoherently.

"Great God! she is delirious, and is burning up with fever.

"Father in Heaven! save my noble, brave girl from death!" and the man dropped on his knees by the side of the cot and burst into tears.

CHAPTER LIL

THE RENEGADE'S RETURN.

It was some time before the strong man, worn down by long imprisonment, chagrin and cruel treatment, could gain the mastery over himself.

A while before life seemed to have sunshine drifting through the dark clouds that hovered over him.

He was free, two of his worst foes, the red-skin and the panther, were dead, his chains were broken, and he held the cabin, and the idol of his life, his daughter, was with him.

There seemed to be but one obstacle for him to overcome, and that was the man who had brought all this sorrow and misery upon him.

With no idea that his cabin had changed hands, Hugh Harcourt, he felt, would return and fall a ready victim, and he would be avenged.

But then, in the midst of his hopes came again blank despair in finding that after all his beautiful daughter had yielded to the tremendous weight upon her, and was stricken down with fever.

She had been long worried, had passed through much danger and hardship, the cavern damp had impressed her, and at last the struggle with the Indian and the panther, in which she had felt the fangs of the brute crunching through her tender flesh to the bone, had been too much even for her strong nature.

To remain there repining Anson Insley knew would not save Edna.

If she lived, it must be through his care alone.

Instantly the thought came upon him in all its fullness; he mastered his emotion, and rose to his feet perfectly calm.

Laying his hand upon her pulse, he saw that it was beating rapidly, and her skin seemed to scorch him.

He had acquired considerable knowledge of herbs and their uses during his border experiences, and the cabin was well filled with these medicinal plants, gathered by Snake-with-wings, who was, or had been, a medicine chief.

Setting to work, Anson Insley prepared what he thought best, gave them to Edna in proper doses, and watched the effect most anxiously.

And thus the days and nights passed away,

Edna seeming to remain at a stand-still, and her father devoting his whole time to her.

At last the crisis came, and Anson Insley knew she must die or live within the next few hours.

She seemed, he thought, a trifle better, and he hoped for the best.

He had just left her for an instant to feed and water the horses for the night, and had left the door of the cabin partly open to let in a little fresh air.

A few sticks of wood were thrown on the fire to give light, for night was falling, and turning, Anson Insley beheld a man gazing upon her and standing in the doorway.

There was no need for him to look twice to see who that man was.

It was Hugh Harcourt, and he held a knife in his hand.

His weapons Anson Insley knew were not near him, for they hung upon the wall near the head of Edna's cot.

But driven to madness at the sight of his foe, with a cry like a wild beast he sprung upon her.

So sudden, so unexpected was the attack, from a man believed in his power, in spite of his not finding him chained in his cavern den, Hugh Harcourt was taken at disadvantage, and the hand that grasped the knife was in the clutch of his enemy before he could use it.

Anson Insley had been a very powerful man, before his imprisonment had worn him down, and he had a man of great strength to deal with; but, maddened at the thought of all he had undergone at the hands of Hugh Harcourt, forgetting that the same blood flowed in their veins, recalling the fact that his loved daughter lay there, perhaps another victim of the villain before him, he seemed endowed with superhuman power, and the struggle was a fierce one.

Into the cabin he dragged Harcourt, at the first onslaught, and clinching, they had gone down together.

Then, over the floor they fought like wild animals, each striving for the knife held by Hugh Harcourt.

For awhile it seemed as if Anson Insley would be the victor; but ere long his weakened frame gave out, and with grim joy, Hugh Harcourt hissed:

"Ha! you are failing, Anson Insley, and again I will have you in my power.

"I could kill you now, but I would not, for I will spare you, to wring by vilest torture from your lips the secret of where you have buried your gold."

"Never!"

"You'll yield when I put the torture to you.

"Come, you are now but as a child in my arms, and back to your den you go—Good God!"

The last cry was from the lips of Hugh Harcourt at suddenly beholding before him the slender, torturing form of a woman.

It was Edna, but worn to a wreck, and her marble-like face, wan and haggard, her eyes far sunken in her head, gazed upon him with unnatural brilliancy, while in her hand she held a pistol.

Another step forward and the bullet sped straight.

Down dropped the haughty head of Hugh Harcourt, and as one bereft of life his muscles relaxed and he lay like a dead weight upon the form of his victim.

With a last effort Anson Insley threw off the weight and staggered to his feet, just in time to catch his daughter, from whose hand had fallen the weapon, and who was sinking down upon the floor.

Back to her cot he carried her, a giant in strength once more, and bent anxiously over her.

"I am unharmed, my brave girl; that wretch is dead, and at last we are free.

"The fever and delirium have left you, so live, live for me, my beautiful Edna."

The weary eyes slowly opened, a smile came upon the thin lips, and she said faintly:

"I will live, father."

Rejoiced at her words he forgot himself and the fatigue of his savage struggle, and did all in his power to aid nature in casting off the disease that had so long held her in its fetid embrace.

She had taken a reviving draught he had given her, and sunk into a peaceful sleep, from which he hoped and believed she would awaken with strength, and a hope of rapid recovery.

Over her cot he bent until he felt that he could leave her, to close the half-open door, and carry the body through the cavern, to throw with that of the Indian and panther's, for he muttered:

"No, I can never give him burial, even though the same blood flows in our veins."

He turned, and then a cry broke from his lips.

And no wonder, for the bright firelight showed no form lying upon the floor.

Silently had Hugh Harcourt crept from the cabin and disappeared in the darkness.

With the morning Edna awoke, and with joy her father saw that she was greatly refreshed, and instead of her effort of rising from her bed to his aid injuring her, it seemed to have helped toward her recovery.

Her first glance was toward the floor, where had lain the form of her wicked cousin.

Not seeing it, she turned to her father for explanation.

"I carried it off and buried it," he said with ready presence of mind, excusing the falsehood under the plea that it was better for her than to think that he was dead.

But he had already discovered, by going out to the adjoining cabin, that Hugh Harcourt had gone, and he had carried with him Wonder and the mustang that had belonged to Snake-with-wings.

The trails of his horse and the others led down the canyon through the snow, which here and there near the cabin was stained with red drops, showing that Edna's shot had certainly wounded, if it had not killed the desperate man, and cowed him enough to make him seek safety in flight.

CHAPTER LIII.

BENT ON MISCHIEF.

WHEN Hugh Harcourt was suddenly confronted by the form of Edna Insley, in his struggle with her father, he became momentarily unnerved, so ghastly did she look, and believed that his end had come, yet he seemed not to have the power to resist.

The bullet fired by Edna was well aimed, for it struck the object at which the muzzle pointed—the head of her enemy.

But the ball glanced along the skull, making an ugly flesh wound, though by no means a serious one.

Its effect upon the man was momentarily stunning, and seeing that it was not followed up instantly by another, his cunning led him to pretend to be dead, and so he was believed.

Knowing that the father was bending over his daughter, he quietly turned his head and saw that he was unnoticed.

Instantly, with the stealthy movement of a panther, he arose and glided out of the door into the darkness.

For the first time in his life he had trembled in the face of death, and that death threatened at the hands of a woman, and he dared not go back and face the father and daughter in the cabin.

"The cursed wound has unnerved me, and I feel shaky, so shall go now.

"But another time I will reap my full revenge, for they are wholly in my power—or shall be!"

What his last firmly-uttered words meant was soon evident, for straight to the cabin stable he went, and there he had left his horse when he returned to find such an intense surprise awaiting him.

To saddle his own steed and put a lariat on Wonder and the mustang, and lead them from the stable, was a moment's work.

Then he bound a handkerchief around his head, mounted his own horse, and leading the other two, rode off in the gloom, far more willing to face the darkness, the snow and the long trail than those he had left in his cabin.

Having already decided upon his course, as he rode along, he directed his steps toward a third mountain retreat he had made for himself in those fastnesses, and which Snake-with-wings had not known of.

This was a cavern of vast size, the entrance to which was almost inaccessible, and the existence of which no one would ever have suspected.

He had one day climbed a lofty tree to get a bear which he had shot with his rifle, and which had not fallen, but died in between two branches.

He had tumbled the bear to the ground, and was about to follow, when he saw right across from him on the cliff a cave.

It opened out upon a shelf of rock, but there was no possibility of a man reaching the cave from either side, yet he might descend to the entrance from the cliff above.

Descending the tree, he secured his bear-skin, strapped it upon the back of his horse, and rode around to reach the top of the cliff.

This he found impossible to do on horseback; but by the free use of his lasso to draw him from tree to tree and point to point, he at last scaled the cliff and stood on the top looking over into the deep canyon from which he had come, the tree into the upper branches of which he had climbed, and down upon the shelf of rock.

Fastening his lasso to a scrub pine, he had let himself down to the shelf.

"Ha! here is a hiding-place worth having, should I ever be driven to seek it by either Indian or pale-face," he had said.

Boldly he entered the cavern, and saw that he was in a vast rotunda, beyond which was a large tunnel running downward.

He lit some fat pine splints he always carried with him, and to his surprise, after following the winding, tunnel-like cave for a few hundred yards, came to daylight.

Before him was a dense pine thicket, completely concealing the rear entrance to the cavern, and so thoroughly hidden that his horse stood within a few feet of him, just where he had hitched him, and the idea of finding a mouth of a cave there he had not dreamed of.

The opening was plenty large enough for him to lead his horse through, and the intelligent animal had followed him without any hesitancy. As the upper end was preferable as an abiding place, Hugh Harcourt had made it his most secret retreat, and during the few years that had followed, up to the time he was presented to the reader in the person of Old Buckskin, he had fitted it up with real comfort and stored it well with dried game and provender for his home.

It was to this place he wended his way after retreating from his canyon cabin, and reaching it the following day, for he was as much at home in the mountains, as a grizzly bear, he settled himself down to heal his wound and more thoroughly mature a plan he had half-formed in his evil brain.

CHAPTER LIV.

A STRANGER IN POKER CITY.

SOME two weeks after the flight of Hugh Harcourt from the canyon cabin, where he left Edna and her father in full possession, a stranger rode into Poker City one afternoon.

He looked the city sport throughout, from his patent-leather boots, kid gloves and velvet vest, to his heavy watch chain and eye-glasses.

He had blonde hair, worn long, side whiskers, and a mustache of the same hue, and would have better suited a city thoroughfare as an exquisite, than the festive camp known as Poker City.

He was well mounted, but if armed, his weapons were not visible.

Some of the loafers about the Ranchero's Exchange set him down as an English lord, others said he was a mine-buyer, and more thought he was a soft city gambler, come West to show what he could win from hard-fisted miners.

As soon as he had written his name in the register of the hotel, and been shown to his room by a Chinese bell-boy, so-called from courtesy, as there was not a bell in the Exchange, an eager crowd rushed up to have a look at it.

"Captain Brass—Brasstown."

Such was what they read, and it made all hands look at each other.

"Waal, ef he don't git ther brass polished up on him in this heur town I are a liar," said one.

"He'll be sorry he ever left Brasstown," remarked another.

And so on the remarks went the rounds, until the landlord, wishing to protect a guest who seemed to have money, said:

"I tell you, boys, my opinion is that he's a United States detective, and if so he's got backers, so you'd better go slow."

This was a startling opinion to give, for hardly a man present, who had been expressing himself freely, but what was "wanted" in other parts from whence he had come, and visions of misdeeds committed, and a thought that perhaps he was the one for whom the stranger had visited Poker City, caused Car-

rots to lose a number of good customers that afternoon, for the mass of the hotel loungers decamped, to hang fire elsewhere, until the real business of Captain Brass in coming there was known.

Of those who knew their comrades, as well as themselves, to be legitimate scoundrels, a meeting was held, and two of the most innocent of their company were selected to visit the hotel and discover the whys and the wherefores of the coming of Captain Brass.

Though they went together these worthies were not to seem to be working in partnership, and sat on different sides of the large fireplace, until the appearance of Captain Brass after supper.

He edged his way into the best place at the fire, lighted a cigar, and with his hands behind his back began to puff away with a look of perfect contentment, while he eyed the crowd with a complacent stare, that would have caused him to be instantly "jumped," but for that detective idea set afloat.

"I say, stranger, yer name are Brass, hain't it?" asked Sandy Tom, one of the committee of two, and whose face would have served as a model of Sin, for it was so well stamped with wickedness.

"Yes, my name is Brass," was the complacent reply.

"Gilt edge Brass, I guesses?" said Sandy, and a number present tittered.

"No; Steel-edge Brass."

This remark was suggestive, but Sandy went on:

"I know'd a Brassy family in Old Kentuck, an' you hes ther look of 'em in your face."

"No accounting for resemblances, my man, for in your face I see the very likeness of a murderer that is wanted in Kentucky."

This was a center shot, and Sandy Tom turned deadly pale and poked the fire viciously, while the crowd laughed, and the second one of the investigating committee of two, feeling it incumbent upon him to say something, remarked, as he looked at the stranger:

"Perhaps thet are your biz, lookin' fer felers as the law offers a reward fer?"

"It is, Digger Dave, and you are my game."

Instantly all present saw that the stranger was armed, for a revolver suddenly appeared in either hand, and one covered the heart of Digger Dave, who started back with a cry of terror.

"I want you, sir, to come with me to my room."

Captain Brass stock went up above par at once, for that crowd saw he was a man to take care of himself in spite of his fancy attire and dandy looks.

An ordinary officer of the law would have found many to side against him; but believing him to be a Government detective, one the military would protect, no one resisted his arrest of Digger Dave, whom he led away to his room, while Sandy Tom, in abject terror, slipped away to report his discovery to his waiting comrades.

CHAPTER LV.

CAPTAIN BRASS.

"WELL, sir, who am I?"

"Ther devil only knows, an' he won't tell," was Digger Dave's blunt reply to the question of Captain Brass when the two had entered the room of the latter.

"Well, knowing you, Dave, as a most consummate rascal, I will tell you that I am a man who has a little work on hand that requires just such men as you are to carry me through with it."

"Waal, ef I helps yer, I 'spectes ter git set free."

"That is, you don't wish to be taken back to Kentucky to be tried for killing your—"

"Jist hold yer gabble, cap'n, for whar's ther use recallin' up them onpleasant mem'ries o' ther past?"

"Yer has me, dead sure, an' yer knows me, or I lies; but ef yer wants a man ter help yer, I'll do it ef yer lets up on me."

"Well, I do want not only you, but more of your kind to aid me."

"You means others as has ther same cause as has I fer lovin' these heur parts better than where we come from?"

"Exactly."

"Men as yer 'spectes will play ther tell-tale on ther fellers as has big rewards set on 'em, ter save 'emselves?"

"Curse your rewards! I am not looking up

men to take East, merely to get the rewards offered for their capture, though I could doubtless do a tremendous business here in Poker City by capturing all under exile."

"Oh! yer don't mean ter say yer isn't a detective?"

"I play any part I wish."

"Is yer playin' now?"

"I am."

"Then yer hain't been sent arter me ter take me back ter Kentuck?"

"No."

"Hallyloojah!"

"But I know of your crime, and that five thousand was offered by the Governor for your apprehension."

"My appy—what?"

"Your capture."

"Yes, that is ther sum he concloode I were wuth, fer he sat consid'ble store by me."

"So you told me one day when you were drunk."

"Durnation!"

"Yes, your tongue let out the secret."

"You don't mean it, pard?"

"I do."

"Waal now, who is yer, fer ther Lord's sake?"

"It does not matter now; but take me to where I can find Bill Joyce."

"Bill Joyce?"

"Yes."

"Yer knows him too?"

"That he is as wicked as you are."

"Then he are a bad man for sartin."

"And Bummer Bob."

"Yer want ter see him too?"

"I do, and Lasso Dan, and Arizona Kit, and—"

"Now look heur, pard, yer jist knows all ther old gang."

"You mean the old outlaw gang known as the Mustang Hunters, which the soldiers broke up, after hanging half of them?"

"Jeroisher! yer has got 'em down fine."

"I know that there are fully a dozen of them in Poker City, though not as one organization now, but as loafers, petty thieves, miners, when they have to work, and cut-throats at large."

"Oh hokey! Don't yer know 'em, stranger pard!

"Pears ter me yer know'd Sandy Tom to-night?"

"I did."

"And you won't tell me who you are?"

"Yes."

"Waal, spit it out, fer I are all ears like a jackass."

"To-night the gang, believing me a United States detective, hunted cover somewhere?"

"Lordy!"

"And you and Sandy were sent up to the hotel to reconnoiter."

"Hallyloojah!"

"Sandy has gone back to report; but you did not."

"I'll s'war ter that; but I'd like ter go."

"Well, take me to the shanty where the old band of Mustang Hunters are, and you are free."

"Pard, does yer know what they'd do with me ef I did?"

"Digger Dave, do you know what I'll do with you if you don't?"

There was no doubting the significance of tone and manner, and Digger Dave said ruefully:

"Waal, it are a case for a lawyer ter decide what I are ter do."

"I'll decide for you."

"Come, take me there, and, as I said, you are free, and I'll offer you good terms for the future."

"Pard, they'll chaw me up."

"No."

"They'll b'ist me."

"See here."

"Waal?"

As he spoke the stranger arose, drew his revolver and slipped his hand in the miner's arm, in a free and easy way.

With his knife he slit a hole in his woolen shirt on the left side, and into this thrust his hand, still grasping the revolver, which had its muzzle dangerously near the heart of the now frightened man.

"Come, Digger Dave, we'll take a little walk together, and get the air."

"We go just as we are now, and if, when passing through the crowd, or out upon the street, you make the slightest effort to cry out,

my finger touches the trigger, and the boys will have you to bury in the morning.

"I give you just fifteen minutes to find the shanty where the gang now are, and if you do, well and good, and if you do not, then your chips will be called in."

"Now, sir, march."

And arm in arm the two men, the gorgeous-looking stranger and the rough desperado, left the room, the latter as white as a corpse, for he knew how thoroughly he was at the mercy of the man at his side.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE SECRET RENDEZVOUS.

IT was somewhat a surprise when the man calling himself Captain Brass of Brasstown, arm-in-arm with Digger Dave, came through the social hall of the hotel, on the way to the street.

There were some who laughed at Dave, seeing that he looked badly scared, and a few questions were asked:

"Whar did yer catch him, cap'n?"

"Thet are ther way I ust ter walk with my old ooman ter Sunday service."

"Are he guilty or not guilty, cap'n?"

"Brace up, Dave, fer yer looks skeert."

"Whar is yer goin', pards?"

"Does yer want company?"

Such was the fire that Captain Brass and Dave had to run the gantlet of, in passing out to the street.

As for Digger Dave, he looked as solemn as a deacon passing round the hat on a rainy Sabbath, and said nothing.

Captain Brass laughed lightly, nodded, and made no reply.

Reaching the street, Dave did not seem to know which way to go, and the captain halted.

"Which way, pard?" he asked.

"You know which way," was the stern reply.

"Oh, Lordy! I are cold meat ef I take you thar," groaned Dave.

"You are if you don't."

"When, pard?"

"Now."

"Then I guess I'll sa'nter along."

"Is you goin'?"

"You know I am."

"So you is; waal, I feels uncommon oncomfortable, but I s'pose I must."

"I know you shall."

Dave heaved a deep sigh of resignation, and walked on.

After going down the principal street for some distance, he turned off toward a jutting spur of an overhanging mountain, and in a few minutes halted before a stout cabin built against the cliff.

"Here we is, pard."

"Then go it."

"I can't."

"Knock!"

Dave was about to say he did not know how, when he felt the revolver muzzle digging into his ribs, and instantly his hand fell heavily upon the door in three heavy blows.

"Who?" asked a stern voice, after a minute's pause.

"Me."

"Who?"

"Digger Dave."

"The name?"

"Mustang."

There was heard within the removing of a heavy bar, and the door was opened, and in stepped Dave and his strange companion.

"Hello! who in thunder are this?" cried the man, who had let them in.

"A friend," whispered the captain to Dave.

"A friend," cried Dave, who felt the pistol muzzle.

"Yer vouches fer him, Dave?"

"I does."

"Waal, come in, an' tell us what were ter pay up at ther hotel, fer Sandy hev said that were hot times fer you."

"There be," groaned Dave, not putting the "hot times" in the past, or feeling that they were past by any means. It was very dark and the man, after closing the door moved forward, and the next moment a light shone ahead.

It came from a secret door at the back of the cabin, and opened into a rock chamber running under the cliff.

There were a couple of tables, some chairs, and a lantern as the furniture of the room,

and as occupants nine men, one of whom was Sandy Tom.

That Tom had been talking, and telling some exciting story was evident, for the crowd were assembled around him, as the three entered.

"Pards, here are Digger Dave an' a friend, he calls him," said the door-opener, as the three stepped into the rock chamber.

Instantly every eye fell upon the tall form of the very man who had been the subject of their conversation, when interrupted by the knock on the door, and each man present was upon his feet in an instant, and quick as a flash the hearts of Digger Dave and the stranger were covered by nine revolvers, and as many lips breathed one word:

"Betrayed!"

CHAPTER LVII.

THE DESPERADO DOZEN.

THAT Digger Dave was desperately scared, by the sudden act of his comrades, his face plainly revealed, for he shrunk back in terror, his hands outstretched for mercy, while the door-keeper also turned quickly, and springing out of range of the shots of the others, covered him with his revolver.

But Captain Brass, on the contrary, showed not the slightest alarm.

Nor did he raise the weapon he had been threatening Dave with, or exhibit hostile intention.

Calmly folding his arms, and smiling, he said:

"Well, comrades, have you no welcome for an old friend?"

"Old friend? You is a detective on our trail," said a burly fellow, taking it upon himself to be spokesman.

"No, Lasso Dan—"

"Yer knows me?" gasped the man.

"Yes, Lasso Dan, I know you well, and I repeat, I am no detective, but on the contrary an old comrade," said the stranger.

"Who is yer?"

"Captain Brass of Brasstown."

"Does any of yer know him, pards, fer I doesn't?" and Lasso Dan appealed to all present.

"Nary one knows yer, pard," he continued, as all shook their heads.

"And yet I know all present, and can call the roll from Arizona Kit to Bummer Bob."

"Then that thar traiter hev betrayed us," and all scowled upon Digger Dave, who shouted lustily:

"Fore Heaven, I hasn't, pards, as he kin tell yer."

"Yer fetched him heur."

"Yas, an' yer'd hev did ther same ef yer hed a shootin'-iron a-ticklin' yer ribs all ther way."

"He told me he were a old pard o' ther Mustang Hunters."

An exclamation broke from the crowd at this, and Captain Brass said:

"Yes, I forced Dave to bring me here, with my revolver on his heart, and I told him the truth when I said I was a friend of the old Mustang Hunters."

"I never seen yer afore."

"That shows how good my disguise is."

"Ah! yer is under a disguise, is yer?" cried Lasso Dan.

"Yes."

"Waal, who be yer?"

"Did you ever see a hunter they call Old Buckskin?"

"Waal, we hev, but he hain't nuthin' ter do with ther Mustang pards that were."

"That you need not be so sure of, Lasso Dan."

"Waal, he didn't give none o' us ther sign."

"Nor hev I."

"Thet are so, but yer can't get out o' heur without it."

"We shall see."

"Say, pard, has yer a regimint o' sogers outside?" asked Dan, in alarm, and all looked uneasy.

"No, I am alone."

"Waal, we hev got yer dead then."

Without noticing this remark, the stranger asked:

"Whatever became of your captain?"

"You mean Cap'n Hugh?"

"Yes."

"Waal, he got caught, but managed ter git away, an' durned ef he hain't been chawed up by grizzlies, or scalped by reds, fer all we knows, fer he hain't show'd up heur since he

got his neck out o' ther noose ther Vigilantes hed around it."

"Pards, I am Captain Hugh."

A yell broke from the crowd, for with the utterance of his words the stranger had removed his most cleverly made disguise, and the dark, evil face of Hugh Harcourt, the man of numerous aliases and disguises was revealed.

It was evident, from the welcome he received, that he was most popular among the band, or the remnant of the band of horse-thieves which he had once commanded, and Digger Dave, in his delight, danced around him with a step that reminded one of the gambols of a baby elephant, while he took the whole credit of the captain's coming upon himself.

"Whar hes yer been, cap'n?"

"How chipper yer is a-lookin'."

"Times look good with yer."

"Waal, now, I are glad ter see yer."

"Any more biz on hand, cap'n?"

Unable to reply to one and all the inquiries pouring upon him, Hugh Harcourt said:

"Boys, I am not only not dead yet, but I am on the trail for gold and revenge more than a miser for the one and a wolf for the other."

"I know these mountains as you do this cabin, and I have got retreats old Black Bear and his whole band can't find, and I intend going into business again."

"Bully for ther cap'n," came a chorus of voices.

"I have a little game up in the mountains I am playing alone, but I have little hope that it will yield me more than revenge, but I'll get out of it all of that which it will yield, you can swear."

"But I need money, and so do you, and I can get it for all of us."

"You is singin' ther correct tune now," cried one.

"We is yer honies," said another.

"Cap'n, jist you be ther kite an' we'll be ther tale."

"My plan, then, is for you all to quit loafing and go to work."

"Thet are hard, cap'n."

"Get the confidence of the good people of Poker City."

"Work hard, quit drinking, and in a short time nobody will suspect you of being the rascals you are."

"That are so, fer we'll jine ther meetin' held by Parson Skimmins."

"Don't go it too strong, only appear good, honest fellows up to spring, and then if anything goes wrong, you know, no one will suspect you."

"In the meantime I'll lay all my plans, and when we set to work we'll make fortunes."

"We is to be a band, then?"

"Yes; and as we are just twelve, we'll call ourselves the Desperado Dozen."

"Thet are ther p'izen o' a good name, cap'n."

"Yes; I like it, and the Overland and settlers will soon dread it, though no one must suspect any of us."

"As for me, I'll be thought a detective still, and go back to the hotel and say I was mistaken in Digger Dave."

"Thet will give me a recommend, an' ef yer will, only throw in a little soft soap, cap'n, Carrots will let me hang up a drink or two now and then," said Dave.

"Now, boys, you understand that your old captain is on the trail once more."

"This time it is not horse-stealing, but a gold trail."

"Here, treat yourselves all round, and keep together."

He threw down a handful of gold on the table, and after a few more words retraced his way to the hotel, where he won the way to the hearts of all in the bar by treating to drinks all round.

Going up to his room, he began pacing to and fro, and half aloud he muttered:

"Well, this is good so far, and if I don't force from Anson Insley the secret of where he has hidden his gold, I will take to the Overland trail as a road-agent in the spring."

"If I do get the gold I'll marry that haughty girl, Edna, and seek other lands."

"Well, the spring will soon show what is to be."

"They cannot leave the cabin until the snow is all gone, and there is no danger of an Indian even going there, so they are safe."

"But as it would not be safe to return alone, I'll go to the camp of old Blue Cloud, the renegade Sioux chief, and get half a dozen of his

young warriors to return with me to the cabin, and then I will have it all my own way.

"Ay, so much of my own way that I will kill Anson Insley and his daughter, too, if I cannot find the gold."

Having made up his mind as to his course, he retired to rest and slept as though his was not a crime-stained conscience, so hardened had his heart become with wickedness.

For some time he remained in Poker City, gambling heavily at the Palace of Fine Arts, and seeming to enjoy life, and watching closely the conduct of the members of the Desperado Dozen to see if he could rely upon them.

At last, feeling that the spring was near at hand, he mounted his horse and set forth for the distant camp of the renegade Sioux chief, bent upon the fulfillment of his fiendish plot for gold against Anson Insley and his beautiful daughter.

CHAPTER LVIII.

PISTOLS STILL TRUMPS.

WHEN Wild Bill entered the heart of the mountains, still bent on tracing up the fate of Edna Insley, his intention was to find alone the hiding-places of Old Buckskin. The old hunter had the reputation of having several retreats in the mountains, and one of these Wild Bill had trailed him to with Mark Manning, the St. Louis lawyer, and thence on to the scene that followed, when he had held a full hand of trumps against Lone Pale-face in his little game to get possession of Red Dove.

His first move was to go to this cabin.

But he found it empty, and no sign that it had been very lately occupied.

Then he retraced his way to the vicinity of Poker City, and took the road which Old Buckskin had taken with Edna, the night of the killing of Trailer Tom.

His wonderful manner of reading the signs about him, gave him an idea of the course which they must have taken.

But getting further into the mountains, he was at a loss to know which way they could have gone.

Could he not find the retreat, which he felt confident could not be very many miles away, after a few days' search, it was his intention to go to the village of Black Bear, and get a hundred of his best warriors, and then he knew success was certain.

For two days he searched alone, not wishing to call on the Indians if he could avoid it, and not desiring to lose the time it would take to go to their village and back, for the mountains were not yet wholly free from snow, and the traveling was dangerous and bad.

At the end of the third day he was about to start for the village, and give up further search alone, when, hanging on a small tree, just in front of his face he saw an object fluttering.

Riding forward he saw that it was a lady's veil.

The wind had whipped it out, and the veil was badly torn; but still it held firmly upon the branch, which had evidently caught it as Edna rode beneath, and drawn it from her head, for he did not doubt but that it was hers.

After looking at it carefully he came to several theories that were correct:

First. It had been months on that branch.

Second. It had been torn from her head while she was passing beneath on horseback.

Third. The manner in which it was caught on the branch showed that she was going to the north.

Fourth. It was taken off at night, or she would have returned and taken it off.

Fifth. It was torn off in the midst of the snow-storm, that had followed her departure from Poker City, or she would have at any rate turned and searched for it; but as she did not, she was doubtless urged on by Old Buckskin to hastily seek some shelter.

Sixth. Old Buckskin was too good a borderman to look for a temporary shelter in that snow-storm, or to have pressed on, without a definite point in view, and therefore the retreat could not be far away.

The steepness of the mountain path, on which the veil was found, had before prevented Wild Bill from thinking Old Buckskin had led Edna by that rough trail.

But now there could be no doubt which way they had gone, and on Wild Bill went until night caused him to camp.

With the first streak of day he was again in the saddle, and had gone but a short distance,

when he came to a ridge that overlooked a deep canyon.

Down in the gorge, and at its end, curling up above the tree-tops, he saw a thin wreath of smoke.

"By Heaven! I have found them."

The cry broke from his lips in ringing tones, and taking the nature of the country in at a glance, he saw the best way to reach the cabin from whence he knew the smoke must come.

On he rode at a swift canter, where the nature of the ground permitted, and in an hour's time was in the canyon.

But hardly had he entered the wild valley, when he heard several shots fired in rapid succession, followed by wild yells, which he knew but too well were Indian war-cries.

On he sped like the wind, and two minutes after a thrilling scene burst upon him.

Before him were two cabins, and against one of them was piled logs, which had been set on fire.

Around the cabin dodged, from tree to tree, half a dozen forms; and two lay dead upon the grass.

Of those that were carrying on their devilish work, one was a white man, and the others were Indians.

Could he be mistaken in beholding in the white man none other than Lone Pale-face the Mountain Hermit, who had escaped him once before?

No, he knew him at a glance.

With a yell, that drowned the cries of the Indians he dashed upon the scene, his revolvers in either hand.

Not until he went into their midst like a meteor, did the Indians see him, and then they broke in wild terror.

Three fell before his deadly aim, and he could have killed Lone Pale-face; but no, he wished to take him alive.

But then from the cabin came a cry in the voice of Edna Insley, for the flames were gaining headway, and straight forward rode Wild Bill, to put out the fire, for he saw Lone Face and his red friends had fled in terror.

Away from the cabin door he kicked the burning logs, and then out sprung Edna Insley, pale, wan-looking and so changed from her former self that he hardly knew her.

Behind her came Anson Insley, and he cried in ringing tones:

"Oh, sir; let not that wretch escape you!"

"Lone Face you mean?" said Wild Bill.

"Ay, Lone Face, Old Buckskin, Hugh Harcourt, or whatever else he calls himself.

"Oh, sir! you are mounted, and I beg you, although you have saved us, let not that devil escape."

Away bounded Wild Bill in pursuit, and most anxiously did Anson Insley and his daughter await his return.

At last he came back, and he made his report.

On foot the renegade and his Indian allies, which were from a distant tribe, had scaled the steep sides of the canyon and made good their escape, excepting one whom he had brought down with his pistol, and whose scalp hung at his belt.

"I have their horses, however, which I forced them to desert, and we can at once go to Poker City," said Wild Bill.

In a short while the traps in the cabin were packed on the mustangs, and mounting Edna on his own horse, while he rode one of the ponies, the party started on their trail to the mining camp.

CHAPTER LIX.

CONCLUSION.

WITHOUT further adventure Wild Bill, with Mr. Insley and Edna, arrived at Poker City, and were warmly welcomed by the new proprietor of the Hikok House.

Edna was given the same rooms she had occupied before she had started off under the guidance of the treacherous Old Buckskin, as she then knew him, and she was as delighted as a child over new toys, at being once more able to have the prized contents of her trunk at her disposal.

Mr. Insley fitted himself out with a new suit at Sloan's store, and through it was by no means a stylish cut, he began to feel the gentleman once more.

But, as after several weeks' rest at Poker City, Edna's health did not greatly improve, Mr. Insley spoke to Wild Bill upon the subject, and he advised him to take her East to her old home, and, at another time return for

his buried treasure, for it was at a point that would take more than a month to get it.

"The truth is, Mr. Insley," said Wild Bill, "I can see that Miss Edna has suffered so deeply at the hands of Hugh Harcourt, and you have too, that she cannot recuperate while she fears daily he may assume some new disguise and yet wreak his vengeance upon you."

"You are right, I believe, Hikok."

"I know I am, sir."

"If Harcourt was dead, and I deeply regret I did not leave my horse that day and pursue him to the bitter end, she would feel like a different girl, for she would have nothing to fear, and only the bitter remembrances to worry her, and they would soon become to her as a troubled dream."

"Take her East, travel around with her from place to place, and when she is fully restored come back after your gold."

"But she will not let me come alone."

"He may then visit his revenge upon her in some way."

"I pledge you he will not."

"Ah, Hikok, you do not know the man as I do."

"I do know him, and I pledge you he will never avenge himself upon you, or your daughter."

"What pledge is that Mr. Hikok is making?"

Both men started, for Edna suddenly glided into the room.

"I merely said that I would pledge myself that Hugh Harcourt shall never harm either you or your father, Miss Edna," said Wild Bill calmly.

"Oh! Mr. Hikok, if I could only feel that that man was dead, cruel as it seems for me to say so, I would be happy."

"You have heard my pledge, Miss Edna, and I will keep it, if you will go East with your father for a few months, for his health sadly needs a change."

She took the bait he intended she should, for he knew she would not go on her own account, and said:

"Poor papa, he does look miserably."

"Yes, Edna, and I would be glad if you would go East with me for half a year, and then we can return for that gold, which seems to have been such a curse to us."

Gladly she consented, and several days after, Andy Rush carried in his stage, eastward bound, Anson Insley and his beautiful daughter.

After their departure Wild Bill formed his plans to keep his pledge, for well he knew that Hugh Harcourt would live only for devility.

But, kind reader, having concluded my story of the return of Red Dove, the Indian heiress, to once more dwell among her people, and the rescue of Edna Insley and her father from the power of Hugh Harcourt, I must bid you au revoir, with the hope of having you again follow my ink-trail through the further adventures of my hero, and other characters made known to you by these pages, in the romance of "Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, the Desperado Dozen."

THE END.

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